BEM

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BEM
THE COMICS NEWS FANZINE
45P
CATWOMAN
ISSUE

BOLLAND 80

NEWS AT BEM

BEM-28 May 1980

editor & publisher: Martin Lock
consulting editor: Mike Cruden

Once again we have a Bem bigger than any that have gone before -- a grand total of 40 pages, caused by Titan Distributors and Forbidden Planet deciding to take four pages of advertising in the middle. Bem would return to 36 pages next time, except that -- well, extra space is needed if Bem is to develop, and the response from the "Bem Ballot" form sent out to subscribers last time seems greatly in favour of more pages, so... Bem #29 will have 40 pages (more if anyone wants a 4-page ad!), and will cost 50p in shops or by post. For the moment, however, the subscription rate remains at seven issues for £3.00.

Bem-29 will need its extra pages; plans are for it to be a special 2000 A.D. issue, with a couple of interviews, and a cover, plus some suitable interior artwork, by one of their top artists. To fit all the special material into a 36-page issue would have meant cutting back on the regular bits of Bem quite drastically -- now it won't!

I'm relieved that Bem has managed to come out on time; keeping track of all the Eagle Award forms coming in seemed to take an hour or more every evening for over a month! I intend to publish the details next time; to print them this time might influence the voting in the second, final round, which would not be at all fair. As it is, Bem got over a hundred Eagle ballot forms back.

The second round Eagle forms, with the three top contenders in each of the categories, may be out in time to be distributed with Bem to subscribers --if it is too late, I do intend to mail copies to people who sent their first-round forms in to me. Anyone else who wishes to vote, and hasn't got a copy of the form, can certainly send a 10p or 12p stamp to the Bem editorial address

if stocks hold out, they may receive a Fantasy Trader #45 as well.

I mentioned the "Bem Ballot" form briefly earlier; most of the results of this survey should be found later in this issue, but questions 28 to 33 were designed as a sort of fannish adjunct to the Eagle Awards. So, it seems only right to have a "second round" ballot here too -- it has gone out to subscribers, and if anyone else wants to join in, please just send me a suitable stamp (or not, if you're already asking for an Eagle form); the six categories were:-

Favourite new fanzine (not more than 4 issues published)

Favourite fan artist

Favourite fan writer (not Martin Lock or Ed Sallis)

"Hall of Fame" Award for past contribution to fandom

Best fanzine cover of 1979

Best fanzine strip of 1979

Who knows, this could be the start of an annual event! All we need is a good name for the awards, and someone to design a certificate...but, see the form itself for more details.

Reaction fills seven pages again this time, with plenty of frolics and fun for all the family; however, to my mind, one of the main improvements this time in Bem's features is the expansion of Bemuscene to four pages, with a wider range of reviews than before. The only qualification anyone needs to become a contributor to this part of Bem is that they should send in a review or two--unless you happen

to pick comics other people have already reviewed! If you want to join in, Bemuscene is open for your contributions between the 2nd and 7th of June; the magazines reviewed should be the latest possible issues, which for American monthlies would mean August cover-dates or thereabouts. I don't mind the occasional film review, but comics do tend to get preferential treatment; after all, how many comics do STARLOG or STARBURST review? I should add the usual bit about letters for Reaction being sent in as quickly as possible--they do have to be sent to Mike Cruden for comment, and Reaction is usually the first bit of a Bem to be started on. Letters received after the end of May will be read and, I hope, enjoyed--they're just not all that likely to see print, that's all!

This issue sees the conclusion of the first story in the saga of H.M.S. Conqueror; I'm happy to say that the series will be continuing, and the script for a 3-part story is now with Dave Harwood; he's a busy man now, though, so to try to make sure he has the time to complete it, it won't be starting in Bem-29, but in Bem-30. There are some other one or two-page strips in hand which could appear next time; but with all the 2000 A.D. material that is coming together even now, the chances are we'll be glad of the space...

One thing we don't have in this Bem is a follow-up to last time's Dez Skinn interview; not that Dez wasn't ready and willing to answer us, the problem was that we didn't get any appreciable quantity of new questions. Dez may well have an answer soon to "How do I get started in comics?"--stick around and you'll find out.

I get the feeling that Bem is really moving now, and it's most exhilarating; if we all just keep things going, between us we should really take off! -Martin

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Comic News

DC's change to 25 pages of story for 50 cents means that the dollar comics will become the only home for house ads, including the DAILY PLANET pages.

As announced last time, almost every monthly DC comic will contain a 17-page lead story, and an 8-page back-up; the mystery books are using their extra space to introduce continuing features such as in SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE "Mr E", created by Bob Rozakis & Jack C. Harris and drawn by Dan Spiegle, in GHOSTS "Dr 13" (previously seen in PHANTOM STRANGER) by Paul Kupperberg and Michael Adams, and in UNEXPECTED "Johnny Peril" by Mike W. Barr and Jack Sparling. These three series all begin in the December issues.

YOU DEMANDED HIM! NOW YOU'VE GOT HIM!
NO. 24 40¢ AUG
DC COMICS PRESENTS
SUPERMAN AND DEADMAN
I THOUGHT BECOMING SUPERMAN WOULD BE FUN!
BUT INSTEAD OF SAVING THESE PEOPLE, I'VE DOOMED THEM ALL!

TIME WARP #5 is the final issue of this dollar sf comic. Replacing it on the publishing schedules is a 4-issue revival of MYSTERY IN SPACE as a 50 cent monthly, to be edited by Len Wein and containing strips originally done for TIME WARP. The covers will be done by Joe Kubert, and the original numbering will be continued, so that the first new issue will be #111.

After MYSTERY IN SPACE #114 (or #444?), a new bi-monthly sf dollar comic will debut; it will be edited by Paul Levitz, and will feature all-new continuing characters. DC acknowledge that they're taking their conceptual inspiration from 2000 A.D. here.

Editor Len Wein & writer Marv Wolfman will combine talents to bring back "Dial H For Hero". The fact that there is also a Saturday morning TV series of the feature in pilot form is largely a coincidence; after all, there's an Inferior Five pilot around too, and DC isn't planning to revive them yet. A new twist is that, this time around, readers will create and design all the heroes, villains and costumes dialled up. This new title will start with #1, as will THE NEW TEEN TITANS and the sf dollar comic.

The war dollar comic ALL-OUT WAR is cancelled with #6; and G.I. COMBAT is to be DC's second monthly dollar comic. None of ALL-OUT WAR's continuing heroes are expected to move over to G.I. COMBAT, however.

Romeo Tanghal is now the regular artist on the Air Wave feature which will appear in the back of ACTION. Steve Mitchell has been assigned the regular inking chores on the Huntress feature in WONDER WOMAN -- Dave Hunt will become the regular inker on the book's lead stories, from #271.

New DC artist Rodin Rodriguez is drawing the Adam Strange back-up for GREEN LANTERN #132, from a script by Jack C. Harris; after that, Laurie Sutton becomes the regular scripter. Tex Blaisdell is to be the feature's regular inker.

Besides "Mr E", Dan Spiegle is also drawing "Nemesis" as the back-up for BRAVE & BOLD (from scripts by Cary Burkett, and previously announced as "Immortal Man"). Spiegle will also be drawing a couple more issues of JONAH HEX. John Severin will be drawing a 3-part Enemy Ace back-up for UNKNOWN SOLDIER, from a Bob Kanigher script. George Perez will be the penciller on THE NEW TEEN TITANS, the Firestorm back-up in FLASH, and JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA (from #184).

The Spectre will be returning in a special 3-part Dr 13 story written by Paul Kupperberg, and set to appear in GHOSTS late this autumn. The Spectre's characterization will be true to his last incarnation (if that's the word), the Mike Fleisher version from 1974-1975 issues of ADVENTURE. This should prove interesting -- Terry Thirteen doesn't believe in ghosts! Yet...

Gerald Forton is a French artist who has started to work for DC; he's now the regular artist in DETECTIVE COMICS for Black Lightning, and he's also doing three issues of JONAH HEX (#42-44) which will feature a new supporting character (developed by Mike Fleisher and editor Ross Andru) due to spin off into its own regular title soon. The tentative name for the character is DAKOTA.

The guest-stars in this year's JLA-JSA team-up tale in JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA will be the "Fourth World" characters from The New Gods, Mister Miracle, and The Forever People.

The cover of ADVENTURE COMICS #475 is by Brian Bolland; it announces the return of Aquaman to the comic as the regular cover feature. Plastic Man and Starman continue, as the back-ups. In #477 scripter Paul Levitz begins a new Starman adventure, in which DC's space-born superhero travels away from the imperial intrigue that he has been involved with. The new adventures will introduce new supporting cast members.

BRAVE & BOLD #166 teams Batman with Black Canary, drawn by Dick Giordano & Terry Austin--this is the first time that Terry, who used to ink backgrounds for Dick, has inked all Dick's pencils.

DC COMICS PRESENTS #26 will feature 40 pages of new comics in a 48-page format; as well as the Superman-Green Lantern team-up and the second "Whatever Happened To...", starring Sargon the Sorcerer, a 16-page bonus comic is being inserted at no extra cost, previewing THE NEW TEEN TITANS, whose regular comic debuts the following month. Marv Wolfman & George Perez created the new team, which includes Robin, Wonder Girl and Kid Flash, plus new characters Starfire (an alien who projects power blasts), Raven (a girl with martial and mental powers), and Cyborg (a black half-robot character), plus the Changeling (previously known as Beast Boy) -- editor Len Wein says "The team will be The Titans as you've never seen them before. They will be The Titans for the Eighties, instead of the Sixties!" And if you haven't yet decided to look out for DCCP #26, let me just mention that the Superman/GL tale's drawn by Jim Starlin...

Talking of bonuses and Jim Starlin, by arrangement with Radio Shack (part of the Tandy Corporation) four July cover-dated DC comics will contain a 32-page Superman comic insert, featuring the 28-page story of "The Computers that Saved Metropolis", in which the Man of Steel battles Major Disaster, the old GL foe; story by Cary Bates, art by Jim Starlin and Dick Giordano. HOUSE OF MYSTERY #282, ACTION #509, SUPERBOY #6, and LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES #265 are the comics in question.

LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES ≠268 is a fill-in issue by J.M. DeMatteis, Steve Ditko & Bob Wiacek, with a Perez/Austin cover. Ditko is also likely to draw the second half of a two-part adventure featuring the return of the Fatal Five, and the introduction of a new LSH member.

BRAVE & BOLD ≠167 is by Marv Wolfman and Dave Cockrum; it's a World War II story, involving the (Earth-2) Batman alongside the Blackhawks. The following month, Jim Aparo returns as regular artist, for a 1980 team-up with Green Arrow.

DC SPECIAL BLUE RIBBON DIGEST ≠3 features the Justice Society, including a Golden Age reprint from ALL STAR ≠36; ≠4 is a Green Lantern issue. BEST OF DC ≠6 stars Superman and the Daily Planet, ≠7 features Superboy.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPER-HEROES!
40¢
NO 181 AUG.
JUSTICE LEAGUE of AMERICA
I'M TIRED OF PLAYING SECOND FIDDLE, TO ALL YOU SO-CALLED SUPER STARS!
FROM NOW ON YOU WON'T HAVE GREEN ARROW TO KICK AROUND ANY MORE!
THE SECRET YOU NEVER THOUGHT YOU'D SEE!
A MEMBER NO MORE!

Dick Dillin passed away suddenly on March 2nd, 1980, at the age of 52. I'm sure that Bem's readers and contributors join the DC staff, freelancers, and the comics industry in general in mourning the death of one of its cornerstone talents.

Born in 1928, Dick attended Carlos Academy in New York and Syracuse University, and then immediately went to the drawing board to fulfil his life-long ambition, working first on an aviation strip, "Buzz Bennett", for WINGS COMICS. Within a short time, Dick became associated with BLACKHAWK--he worked on it continuously from 1952, when Quality Comics hired him, through DC's acquisition of the line in 1956, up to a few months before the comic was cancelled in 1969.

Dick had left BLACKHAWK to take over one of the most complex challenges DC had to offer, JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, from its original penciller, Mike Sekowsky. Dick's JLA run began with ≠63 (June 1968), and ends with ≠183 (October 1980), missing only ≠153 (drawn by George Tuska) in almost 13 years, during which he established new records of consistency and quality.

Dick also pencilled the individual stories of almost every DC superhero, along with a few dozen mystery stories. DC's announcement of his death says "Each and every assignment was greeted with the same enthusiasm, the same unrelenting artistic integrity that never allowed him to take the easy way out, and the same gentle ways that made us all cherish him.

"Dick's distinctive style, versatility, and total professionalism leave a gap in the field that cannot be filled."

Marvel comics move up to 50 cents at the same time as DC -- on sale in June, cover-dated September. However, for the first two months they will only contain the present 17 pages of story; starting with November cover-dates, an extra 8 pages will be added to the books, containing 5 pages more of story and 3 pages of classified advertising. DC will be giving 25 pages of story, normally a 17-page lead and an 8-page back-up; Marvel, although adding pages makes the books look thicker, will give 22 pages of story, normally used for book-length adventures.

The black & white TOMB OF DRACULA magazine has been cancelled; it seems that the restrictive cover format is being blamed. HOWARD THE DUCK is also selling very, very poorly, largely due to the exceptionally weak covers the magazine has always suffered from. GHOST RIDER and SPIDER-WOMAN are also prime candidates for cancellation, particularly now that Mike Fleisher is spending more and more time back at DC, writing odd issues of BATMAN and BRAVE AND BOLD as well as his western commitments.

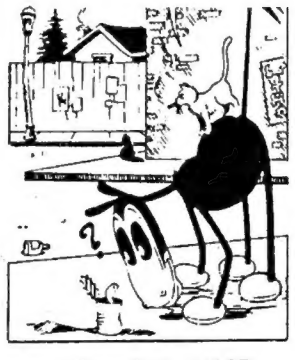
SHOGUN WARRIORS has been cancelled, the final issue being ≠20. Its place on the schedule will be taken by a new book which will be announced shortly. There has been talk of reviving Ka-Zar, and he could be involved. -TCR

John Byrne probably won't be doing that X-Men album supposedly being done for the direct sale market; what with 44 pages a month on X-MEN and CAPTAIN AMERICA, and special 34-page issues of both titles scheduled for the near future, John simply does not seem to have the time.

There's talk of doing new material for SGT FURY, and there will be a romance issue of MARVEL SPOTLIGHT. Al Milgrom will become editor of MARVEL SPOTLIGHT with ≠9. Upcoming features include a CAPTAIN UNIVERSE (from the MICRONAUTS book) solo story by Bill Mantlo and Steve Ditko. -TCR

THE DAZZLER has become the only comic book in living memory to have been cancelled twice without being seen. DAZZLER ≠1 was stopped at the last minute at the printing plant, as Marvel is trying to put together a film deal again, and, as disco is dying, they're thinking of revamping the character.

The X-Men will be appearing in a future issue of ROM. -TCR



NEIL THE HORSE

&

GARTH

"Sapphire" drawn by Martin Asbury

These form the first two mailings of The Newspaper Strip Society. Send £3.75 for a subscription, or an s.a.e. for details, to:-

John Dakin, 7 Cross Court, Denmark Hill, London SE5

1980's Marvel annuals have been announced --as usual, it's pretty tentative, but:

May: SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN ≠2, by Ralph Macchio & Jim Mooney.

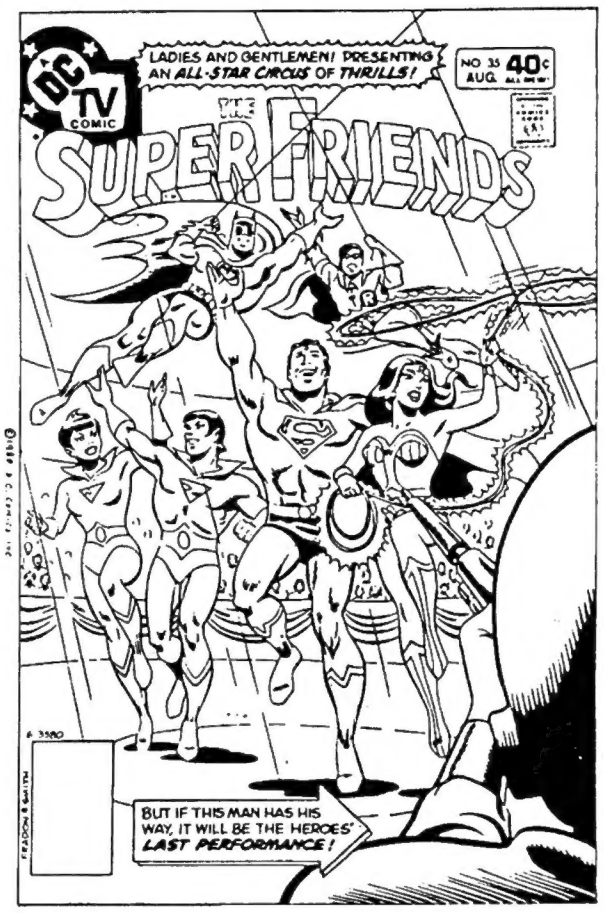
June: MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE ≠5, featuring the Thing and the Hulk; and THE INCREDIBLE HULK ≠9, by Doug Moench, Steve Ditko & Milgrom.

July: FANTASTIC FOUR ≠15; THE MICRONAUTS, by Bill Mantlo, Rich Buckler (who bowed out after 10 pages) and another penciller.

August: X-MEN ≠4, MARVEL TEAM-UP ≠3, with Hulk, Power Man, Iron Fist & Machine Man.

September: AMAZING SPIDER-MAN ≠14 (with a 5-page Aunt May back-up).

There will be no GHOST RIDER annual this year; the THOR annual has also vanished. CONAN ≠115, marking the tenth anniversary of the comic, will be a 75-center with Red


DC TV COMIC
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! PRESENTING AN ALL-STAR CIRCUS OF THRILLS!
NO 35 AUG. 40¢
SUPER FRIENDS
BUT IF THIS MAN HAS HIS WAY, IT WILL BE THE HEROES' LAST PERFORMANCE!

Sonja as co-star, while HULK ≠250 (with the Silver Surfer dropping by), GHOST RIDER ≠50 (in which he meets the western hero of the same name, a.k.a. Night Rider), and MARVEL TEAM-UP ≠100 (co-starring the FF) are also due to be 75 cent editions, as indeed is CAPTAIN AMERICA ≠255, celebrating his 40th anniversary (≠250 is the ordinary size, and has Cap running for president--how could he lose? He does, though, but a WHAT IF will appear later to show what would have been the outcome if he'd won)... and of course X-MEN ≠137 is a 75-center...while, before the decision was made to go up to 50 cents and 40 pages (22 of story), the plan had been for <u>every</u> book to go to 75 cents for one month, with 8 to 10 extra pages of story per book, devoted to "The Secrets Behind..." the book's star, including reprint titles. A $100,000 contest would be announced at the same time. Just think what that would have done to British distribution! -TCR/M

And, talking of 75 cent titles, FANTASY MASTERPIECES isn't to run two issues of the old SILVER SURFER comic per issue--instead, Starlin's WARLOCK stories are taking up the second half of each issue from ≠8 on.

EPIC ILLUSTRATED ≠2 will feature a cover by Richard Corben, as well as a new story by Samuel R. Delaney & Howard Chaykin. -TCR

Ground-level comics publisher and former Marvel scripter Mike Friedrich has returned to Marvel to take a newly created position: liaison to direct-sales markets. He'll be directing the marketing of the collectors' albums as well as new projects. -TCR

Walt Simonson will write as well as draw the BATTLESTAR GALACTICA comic. -TCR

The adaptation of "Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back", by Archie Goodwin and Al Williamson, with an inking assist by Carlos Garzon (most recently the artist on the FLASH GORDON comic book), will be printed in every conceivable format. Marvel will publish their own paperback book (out on May 15th) of their version in order to avoid handing a percentage of their profits over to Del Rey Books (Del Rey has the paperback rights to Star Wars, and Marvel has all comics rights. Evidently, Marvel was able to convince Lucasfilm that the paperback comic book was more of a comic book than a paperback). However, the six issue serialization, starting in STAR WARS #38 (August) will be the only one (apart from the U.K. weekly) that is definitely going to have every page of the adaptation. The magazine "Super Special" version will miss a couple of pages, and the final page count on the tabloid version published by Whitman is not certain. The second three of the monthly comics will be 22-page issues; perhaps one of the stories published in the U.K. but not in America will be serialised in the back?

Mary Jo Duffy is writing a one-shot 48-page ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI comic book drawn by John Buscema & Marie Severin, produced in cooperation with the Franciscan Community Board. It will be distributed on the newsstands in America. -TCR/M

Marvel's ambitious newspaper supplement section (described last time) has been put back a couple of weeks. Like the first trial issue, the second, scripted by Denny O'Neil, will feature Spider-Man and the Hulk; later on, the two characters will be featured in solo adventures, and other Marvel heroes will also be brought in.

A series of special comics prepared to be used as give-aways with 2-litre bottles of Coca-Cola has been cancelled, as they were thought "too violent" by the Coke people. Instead, posters will be used -- while the 34-page stories that had been prepared are sure to turn up somewhere, probably in the annuals--though the 3 STAR WARS issues are likely to turn up in the U.K. weekly.

The books Louise Jones will edit are STAR TREK, BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, MAN-THING, STAR WARS, and X-MEN -- since she was also to be assigned THE DAZZLER and SHOGUN WARRIORS, a couple more books may also come her way to replace them. Al Milgrom takes over AMAZING SPIDER-MAN when O'Neil starts to write it.

Marvel seem to have drawn back on some projects that previously had been announced as regular series -- either the news came from over-optimistic sources who hoped to commit Marvel to what was not definite, or the increase in page-count of 30% has led to a slight trimming in the number of titles projected. The MARVEL PREMIERE and MARVEL SPOTLIGHT books will take some of this material; SPOTLIGHT will take a Black Widow adventure by Duffy, Perez & Abel, while PREMIERE #54 stars Caleb Hammer, by Gillis, Day, & DeZuniga, #55 has Wonder Man by Michelinie & Wilson, and #56 features Dominic Fortune by Wein, Michelinie, Chaykin, and Austin. Two issues will print the first DR WHO story from the British weekly, using new covers by Dave Gibbons.

The back-up feature for the issue of MARVEL SPOTLIGHT due to star Quicksilver in a story by Mary Jo Duffy, Alan Weiss & Bob Layton will be a Triton story, written by Duffy and drawn by Wendy (ELFQUEST) Pini. -TCR

Following this "who's who" of art assignments on THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. (John Byrne in #206, from a Roger Stern script that ties up the "JJJ goes crazy" plotline, Jim Mooney in #207, John Romita Jr in #208, and Alan Weiss in #209), the permanent team on the book will be Denny O'Neil & John Romita Jr. Which will mean that father and son (John Romita is artist on the syndicated newspaper strip) will be regular artists on the same feature. Frank Miller will draw a fill-in issue featuring Doctor Strange as guest-star. -TCR/M

John Romita, Jr will become the regular penciller of MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, from #66. Issue 68 co-stars the Angel, by Gruenwald, Macchio, Wilson & Day. -TCR/M

DR STRANGE #43 has a cover by Mike Golden, who is also the new regular cover artist on ROM.

HULK #252, by the regular team of Bill Mantlo and Sal Buscema, sees the return of Woodgod.

MARVEL TEAM-UP #98 co-stars Thor, by Alan Kupperberg, Alan Kupperberg & Alan Kupperberg!

WHAT IF #23 is "What If the Incredible Hulk Lived in the Time of King Arthur?" by Steve Grant. 'Nuff said, I think!

DC
YOU WILL BELIEVE IN...
GHOSTS
NEW TALES OF THE WEIRD AND SUPERNATURAL
40¢
NO. 81 AUG.
WE'VE KILLED THE CRIPPLED OLD MAN! NOW THEY'LL BE NOTHING TO STOP US FROM INHERITING HIS FORTUNE!

Marvel Britain's new weekly comic, FORCES IN COMBAT, will be on sale May 8th. It contains 32 pages, including a colour centre-spread, and will feature Sgt Fury, Rom, Rawhide Kid, Machine Man, and Master of Kung Fu, plus "Sergeant Mike's Combat Page" and other features. Editor Paul Neary is doing some re-editing of the strips for the British market; there are free gifts in the first three issues, stickers of a tank, a fighter plane, and a battleship.

SPIDER-MAN and HULK merge, with the issue on sale 15th May: the strips will be Spider-Man, Hulk, Defenders, She-Hulk, Spider-Woman, and Marvel Team-ups, while the Bullpen pages and a new-look lettercol are also on board. This means that the Parkhouse/Stokes Black Knight strip has been terminated; the reprints of Silver Surfer, the Beast, the Fantastic Four, Iron Man, Thor, and Daredevil also cease for now.

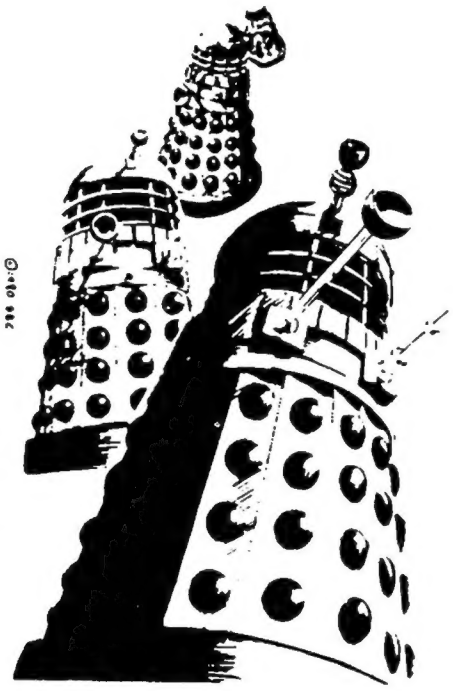
That week also sees the final issue of STAR WARS WEEKLY -- but fear not, the following week sees the launch of STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK WEEKLY. The first issue includes an Empire letraset transfers gift.

DR WHO WEEKLY has artwork covers from #30, by various artists--often based on panels from the strips inside.

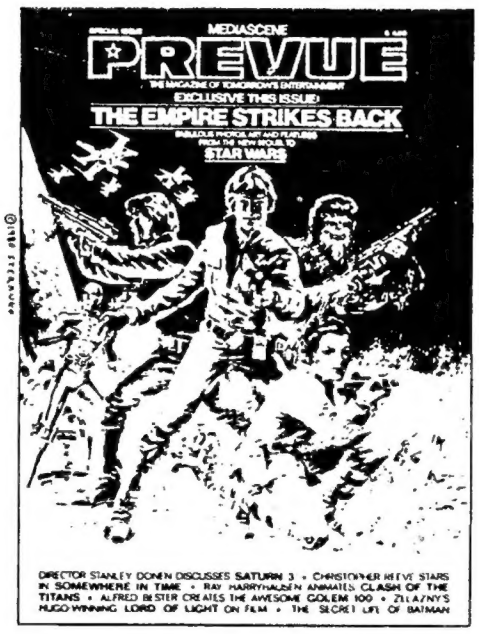
Dez Skinn's six monthly Marvel magazines are FRANTIC, SUPERHERO FUN AND GAMES, and the four 15p, 52 pages (5½" x 8") pocket books -- CHILLER (starring Dracula--TOMB OF DRACULA #59 & #60 are in #1, plus the Satana story from MARVEL PREMIERE #27), SPIDER-MAN (GIANT-SIZE SPIDER-MAN #5 and MARVEL TEAM-UP #15), STAR HEROES (MICRONAUTS #9 & #10 and BATTLESTAR GALACTICA #6), and THE FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR (FF ANNUAL #3 and FF #44).

Dez has also prepared three 52-page, 40p Summer Specials: WESTERN GUNFIGHTERS (with a cover by Frank Bellamy, which he gave Dez as a present on Dez's 21st Birthday -- it's so suitable that Dez couldn't resist the opportunity to use it), DR WHO (reprinting the "Iron Legion" as a complete 34-page story, plus character drawings, photos, and background), and CAPTAIN BRITAIN CO-STARRING THE BLACK KNIGHT (including a text piece which explains the continuity of those two heroes). No progress on HOUSE OF HAMMER #24 yet, but Dez has worked on a special, slick paper, 1500-copy comic drawn by John Bolton adapting a new anthology-type film in conjunction with ITC. It's only for distribution at the Cannes Film Festival though, and is costing about £4 a copy to produce!

Alan McKenzie is working on 3 Summer Specials too--SPIDER-MAN, a romance one, and also WARRIOR WOMEN, presumably including Red Sonja.



Artwork from DR WHO WEEKLY used as the basis for a couple of upcoming covers: due to some postal difficulties, no 2000 A.D. covers have come through in time--they will return in the next Bem, though!


MEDIASCENE
PREVUE
THE MAGAZINE OF TOMORROW'S ENTERTAINMENT
EXCLUSIVE THIS ISSUE!
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
FABULOUS PHOTOS, ART AND FEATURES FROM THE NEW MOVIE TO STAR WARS
DIRECTOR STANLEY DONEN DISCUSSES SATURN 3 • CHRISTOPHER REEVE STARS IN SOMEWHERE IN TIME • RAY HARRYHAUSEN ANIMATES CLASH OF THE TITANS • ALFRED BESTER CREATES THE AWESOME GOLEM 100 • ZELAZNY'S HUGO-WINNING LORD OF LIGHT ON FILM • THE SECRET LIFE OF BATMAN

2000 A.D. prog 164 has a cover of Judge Dredd generally agreed to be his best yet --inside is the latest instalment of the "Judge Child" quest drawn by Ron, plus Robo-Hunter, the VCs, the third of four parts of a Mach-Zero story drawn by Mike Dorey and written by Ian Rogan (who, we can divulge, is in reality editor Steve McManus), and also part three of the new Wolfie Smith serial written by Tom Tully and drawn by Jesus Redondo.

Prog 166 has the start of "The Stainless Steel Rat Saves the World", adapted by Kelvin Gosnell & drawn by Ezquerra; this is actually the third novel in the saga of Slippery Jim DiGriz, but the second was judged not suitable for adaptation at this stage. The cover announces a "Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back" competition and is drawn by Brian Bolland.

Prog 167 features the first in an intermittent series of "comic rock" stories, "The Terror Tube" by Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill, who also drew the cover. Set on another planet, it takes further the concept of a "travel tube" that appeared in early Ro-Busters stories.

Prog 174 sees the finish of the Wolfie Smith serial, the end of the VCs at least for the time being (Cam Kennedy and Gary Leach have continued to share the art chores, but since Cam seems to be rather speedier, he's doing more than half the episodes), and, in all probability, the departure (for now) of Robo-Hunter.

The next "boom issue" is prog 175; it sees the start of a 4-week booklet on "Tharg's Galactic Olympics", written and drawn by Steve Maher, and featuring such sports as acid sea surfing. A sponsored free gift is also enclosed, the Nerve Centre expands to two pages, and 3 or 4 brand-new stories start -- Judge Dredd of course continues. All the new stories are top secret for the moment; more details next time, though!

The Stainless Steel Rat's adventures come to an end, temporarily, in prog 177; Ezquerra moves over to draw the return of Strontium Dog the following week.

And prog 182 has a metal pin-on Judge Dredd badge as a free gift.

Alan Grant and Colin Wyatt are leaving 2000 A.D. at the start of May; that's half the staff! We wish them luck.

The 2000 A.D. Summer Special won't be out until August; it contains 64 pages for 45p, with a Mike McMahon cover, a 10-page Judge Dredd story drawn by Steve Dillon, a 5-page Future Shock written by Alan Moore & drawn by Dave Harwood, features, and "Steel Claw" reprints. August also brings the JUDGE DREDD ANNUAL--96 pages, 32 in colour, for £1.80. There'll be more details next time, but, as the print run is only 50,000, you are advised to buy it early. Only three "futuregraphs" (Dredd's bike, etc) are reprints, the rest is all new, with contributions by Brian Bolland, Ron Smith, Mike McMahon, Kevin O'Neill, Brendan McCarthy, José Casanovas, Dave Gibbons... Publication date, 21st August.

No comics convention has been announced in Britain for the usual August/early September time; Titan Distributors had been planning to hold one, but decided in the end not to. By that time, it was too late for Colin Campbell to organise one for the summer--he hopes to organise one for the autumn half-term weekend though. As ever, more news next time!

Starting with #41, Steranko's magazine MEDIASCENE is changing its name to PREVUE and its format to a slick magazine, with some pages in full colour -- the price is $4.00 (about £2.60) for 88 pages. The first new issue devotes over 30 pages to a preview of a certain well-known sequel to Star Wars. Steranko is hoping to widen the appeal of the magazine, and to gain newsstand distribution.

Warren Publishing have moved up Chris Adames to Managing Editor of the Warren magazines, to replace Louise Jones. Will Richardson (alias Bill DuBay) is now the Senior Editor. EERIE #111 (May) features part 3 of "Blood on Black Satin" by Doug Moench & Paul Gulacy, and 4 other tales: "Motor Psycho Cop" by Nick Cuti, John Garcia & Rudy Nebres, "Samurai: The Messenger" by Larry Hama & Val Mayerik, "Mac Tavish: Fifty Million Spacemen Can't Be Wrong" by Jim Stenstrum and Pepe Moreno-Casaures, and "Haxur" by Victor de la Fuentes. 1994 #12 (may) contains "The Seed" by Will Richardson and Alex Nino, "Jailbreak On Channel 69" by Bob Toomey & José Gonzales, "Over Four Billion Served" by Kevin Duane & DeLando, "Starfire Saga, Part 4" by Richardson & Nebres, "Ghita" by Frank Thorne, and "Baby Makes Three, Part 1" by Duane & Abel Laxamana. ROOK #3 was delayed from May to June. -TCR/M

Comely Comics: CAPTAIN CANUCK #8 stars an 18-page lead story by Richard Comely & George Freeman, with colouring by Freeman & Jean-Claude St Aubin, who has recently joined Comely on a full-time basis and will be pencilling, inking and colouring as well as assisting with story plotting and character design on a new back-up feature which replaces "Jonn" from #9 on --"Beyond", scripted by Richard Comely and drawn by St Aubin. A synthesis of the quest, the fairy tale and the world of enchanted fantasy, it involves Fen, Lady Elodil, Rion, Sandynar, and Sir Brant of the Order of Toth, searching for their village which has been spirited away by a powerful spell. -TCR/M

The May HEAVY METAL contains an 8-page self-contained sample of the new Western strip by Moebius, "Jim Cutlass"; it takes place on the "Mississippi River" (which is the title of the piece) just after the Civil War. A serial by Ribera, "The Alchemist Supreme" begins, and there may well be some excerpts from "Dan Dare: The Man From Nowhere" aboard.

"Captain Sternn", a rarely-seen 9-page colour story by Berni Wrightson, will be in the June issue. HM Communications are planning to launch a companion magazine to Heavy Metal, dealing with adventure rather than sf/fantasy; the end of June is the tentative launch date.

THE SPIRIT #22 features 3 consecutive stories in which The Spirit is blind, another 16-page episode of Eisner's brand-new "Life on Another Planet" comic novel, Chapter 2 of the Wood Spirit serial, a "jam" by Eisner and Kitchen offering an explanation for why Chapter 3 of the Wood serial ran accidentally in #21, the start of Cat Yronwode's comprehensive Checklist to Spirit stories, and more. -TCR

George Evans has been named as the replacement for Al Williamson on "Secret Agent Corrigan", the newspaper strip.

Mike Tiefenbacher, the managing editor of THE COMIC READER, has sold his first script to DC; it's "Whatever Happened to ...Johnny Thunder", and concerns not the "Say you" character with the Thunderbolt, but the western hero. Congratulations, Mike!

The Batman movie will be co-financed by the Casablanca Filmworks, and will have a budget of $15,000,000, according to an article in THE VILLAGE VOICE. W.D. Richter, who adapted "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" and "Dracula" for their recent releases, will be working on the script. Casting has yet to be announced. -TCR

Meanwhile, the Superman II movie may or may not make the June, '80 release date. If it misses this summer, it will be held until the summer of '81. -TCR

JUGHEAD JONES DIGEST #13 reprints the complete 1957 issue of JUGHEAD'S FOLLY, going for up to $12 a copy these days--a novel-length adventure in which Jughead becomes an Elvis Presley-like star of the rock world. The book also features a Ginger story from the '40s. -TCR

The Playboy Press $1.95 paperback STAR HAWKS novel by Ron Goulart, with a wrap-around cover and 6 interior illustrations by Gil Kane, should be published in April --except for a "ghost" period, Kane has drawn the newspaper strip this is based on since its inception; Ron Goulart was removed as scripter by the NEA Syndicate last year, and the strip is now written by Archie Goodwin. -TCR/M

(continued on page 37...

In writing the following, I have drawn a great deal of basic information from Michael L. Fleisher's Encyclopedia of Comic Book Heroes, Volume 1, Batman. I should explain that on the Earth-I/Earth-II question, I have assumed that the encounters between Batman and the Catwoman which, chronologically, must have taken place on Earth-II were duplicated on Earth-I, at a later date. The reason for this is that the first appearance of the Catwoman which can definitely be assigned to Earth-I, DETECTIVE #369, is marked by her being in a spitting rage because Batman has paid a mild compliment to Batgirl in public. The Catwoman states that she has "known him a lot longer than that Jill-Come-Lately", and indeed regards him as being hers if he is anyone's--which certainly suggests they have had a long-lasting relationship. This, combined with the information in fairly recent issues of WORLD'S FINEST that Earth-I has a Julie Madison, who was Bruce Wayne's fiancée when Batman first met the Cat, as she then was, I feel justifies my assumption.

Catwoman Considered

BY KATHLEEN GLANCY

The Catwoman. The Princess of Plunder, the Mistress of Menace, the Empress of the Underworld, the Tigress Queen. A regal image she has, this first and arguably best of the great villainesses. Even the term Feline Felon is not really derogatory --all cats have an innate poise and dignity, and tend to give the impression that they can remember being worshipped in Ancient Egypt and think they still should be.

Selina Kyle was born in probably comfortable middle-class circumstances--she was the daughter of a pet-shop owner who must also have been a cat-lover, since he taught his daughter all about these animals rather than any other. I suspect that the need for excitement which was to characterise her later life was already present in the young girl -- at any rate, when she left school she took a job as an air hostess, a profession with a glamorous image. Whether she was disappointed in the reality we don't know--because quite early in her career her plane crashed, she was hit on the head, and like most characters in comics who are hit on the head in such circumstances, she developed amnesia. Something also happened to her moral values, possibly because whatever her moral or religious background had been, she had forgotten it. She decided to become a criminal.

Achievement is achievement, even on the wrong side of the law, and Selina's was admirable. She was still a young girl, in her late teens or early twenties at the most; she had lost all memory of her past. All she had going for her was her very high intelligence, her perfect health and strength apart from the amnesia, and her beauty -- although she didn't always use that. She became a jewel thief, preying on the very rich mostly. A very successful jewel thief, something of a legend in the underworld. She must, I think, have managed to salt away a very considerable amount of loot in the early part of her career. In later years she was able to set herself up, in the course of elaborate robbery schemes, as a magazine publisher, a high society hostess, a couturiere--all requiring solid financial backing. She was known as the Cat, later as the Catwoman.

And one day she disguised herself as an old woman and went on a cruise, with the intention of separating a wealthy woman from a priceless emerald necklace, and was unmasked by the Batman. There was an immediate and very strong attraction between them, and they both recognised it. Catwoman shows none of the fear that most criminals exhibit at sight of Batman. She is not, and she never will be, at all afraid of him. It is of course difficult to be afraid of a man who, she senses, desires her. "Well" she snaps at him when she stands revealed, the old woman disguise shed, "what's the matter? Have you never seen a pretty girl before?" He must have been staring at her, mesmerised by those green eyes. He is fascinated. So much so that, for the first time in his life, he compromises his principles. He deliberately gives her a chance at escape which she promptly takes. "Lovely girl!" he

murmurs to a not particularly sympathetic Robin. "What eyes! Say -- mustn't forget I've got a girl named Julie. Oh well--she still had lovely eyes!" To all intents and purposes he <u>has</u> forgotten Julie Madison--their relationship, never very profound, is to peter out not long afterwards. And already he wants to meet the Catwoman again -- he has let her go so that he can pursue her again--and he is to do it twice more before she serves her first spell in prison. On both of these occasions she literally slips from his grasp -- having kissed him goodbye before making her escape bid. He remains fascinated; he is able to penetrate her disguises (with one notable exception which we will come to later), and even identify her (disguised) voice on the telephone ("That voice -- I could never forget it!").

The Catwoman is equally fascinated. Within minutes of meeting Batman, she frankly offers herself to him, with a suggestion that he comes over to the side of crime. "Your proposition tempts me", he admits. It doesn't, of course; he isn't at all tempted by the thought of a career in crime. But <u>she</u> tempts him sorely. And sensing this, she renews the offer whenever they meet. Of the two, her motives are the easier to understand. Most of the men with whom she associates are much inferior to her mentally, or physically unprepossessing, or both. In Batman she sees a fitting mate, and being in many ways an honest woman she makes no secret of it.

And Batman? His motivations are more complex. There is, of course, simple physical attraction. The Catwoman is beautiful, with her raven hair and those fascinating green eyes and her superb body. Even for Bruce Wayne, who has seen many lovely women, her beauty is striking. At one point in her career the Catwoman enters a beauty contest open to every young woman in Gotham City. She needs to win it in order to complete a jewel-smuggling job, so she makes elaborate arrangements to dispose of the other three finalists in the final round. But she makes no arrangements about getting into the last four, correctly assuming that her own looks will do that for her. She is, therefore, one of the most beautiful women in that very large city. Add to this that her costume enhances her allure. She is one of the few superheroines or supervillainesses to wear a dress, and one with fairly long skirts -- but these enhance rather than hide the shape of her legs. And then she carries a whip, of course--and uses it with skill. The erotic implications are obvious, especially when you consider the way she and Batman frequently tie each other up.

But in many other ways the Catwoman is a fit mate for the Batman. Indeed, in many ways she is like him. She is courageous, athletic, intelligent, a frequent user of ingenious gadgets, a mistress of disguise, and although the legend of her nine lives was deliberately manufactured by herself to increase her prestige, she is still pretty good at getting out of death-traps. And of course she is apparently able to do what has baffled most other humans, and what Batman himself probably can't do --train the domestic cat effectively. And she is not without principles. She has never been involved with the sort of crimes that hurt ordinary, poor people. The rich are her prey. And she is as determinedly opposed to murder as Batman himself--the fact that she has on several occasions stopped henchmen of hers from harming Batman is irrelevant, of course, since she loves Batman, but her facing up to the Joker in defence of Robin's life is not. She has even been employed by a gang boss who feared incurring a murder charge but could not think of means of robbing without risking lives. He knew that she could, and had, used her superior wits to plan crimes that did not incur that danger.

But the main reason for Batman's attraction to the Catwoman lies in the fact that she <u>is</u> a villainess. Because of the traumatic loss of his mother at an early age, he is afraid to totally commit himself to a woman, from a subconscious feeling that if he does she'll be taken from him as his mother was. (What happened to his Earth-II counterpart, who did marry the Catwoman, can only have reinforced these feelings.) With Catwoman, in every other way so suitable, it is safe for him to admit to himself that he wants her, for while she remains a villainess there can be no future for them, no commitment, no possibility that some night a hoodlum

will shoot her down. And the result of this is that whatever he says, and no doubt sincerely believes on the surface of his mind, he doesn't really want her to reform.

She has made what seem to be sincere attempts to reform--and one way or another Batman has managed to muck them up. While still amnesiac she became attracted to Bruce Wayne, no doubt subconsciously perceiving his likeness to Batman. She confided this to Batman himself, and told him she intended to go straight in the hope of eventually having a chance with Wayne. She was at the time disguised as a beautician named Elva Barr, for the purposes of making face moulds of wealthy clients and making masks from them which could be used to disguise herself and enter their homes to rob, and Bruce Wayne promptly began to court "Elva" and even became engaged to her. But hearing from one of her gang that he really loves one Linda Page, his girlfriend at the time, Catwoman becomes suspicious. She disguises herself as Linda and confronts Bruce. He fails to penetrate the disguise--the first and only time he does not detect the Catwoman whatever she looks like outwardly. On a conscious level, it shows how little Linda must mean to him, since if he loved her he would hardly be deceived by an impostor. Subconsciously -- maybe he has recognised her, but doesn't want to admit it to himself. Wayne, the suave playboy, stammers out an explanation that he is doing a favour for Batman, and his engagement won't be for long. Quite justifiably furious with Batman rather than Wayne, the Catwoman returns to crime with a vengeance.

The Catwoman, in the course of saving Batman's life, gets hit on the head again and recovers her memory. She is at first genuinely horrified at her career as Catwoman, but is persuaded to continue for a while as a police undercover agent. She works well and efficiently, and because of this and her amnesia is given a pardon. Batman even suggests the law might need her services again.

But he doesn't follow this up. It is crime that calls for the Catwoman's services. When the "Whale" Morton gang tries to incriminate her by carrying out cat-crimes, Batman is remarkably ready to believe that she has relapsed, perhaps because his secret wish is that she would. She takes the field to trap Morton, and ultimately succeeds. Similarly, during another rash of cat-crimes perpetrated by one "King of the Cats" he is jealously quick to impute her hesitation to help in apprehending the King--you may notice the one time he does ask for her help there is a strong cat motif present -- to her having fallen in love with the other cat person. Actually, it's her brother Karl; and ironically after saving his life (and Batman's, by jumping into a cage with a

live tiger and distracting it with her cape) she convinces him to reform.

Ironically, because her own relapse follows. Her pride is stung by a series of newspaper articles on her defeats by Batman (nothing apparently about her subsequent heroic work, which makes one wonder how much publicity it got), and she returns to crime. Or could it be she's noticed he was much less interested in her since her reform? Or that, as Batman perceptively remarks, she misses the excitement. Commissioner Gordon refers, in this story, to "the way you tried to get her to go straight", and Batman himself moans "I've done everything to keep her from crime."

Oh yeah? Let's consider, from the start of their relationship, just what he has, and hasn't, done.

She has several times, in the early part of their relationship, tried to seduce him into joining her in crime. They are both aware of their attraction--he could have tried a reverse approach and tried to coax her into going straight. It might well have worked.

The "Elva Barr" affair: Batman certainly demonstrates something less than his usual keen intelligence throughout that. In fact, if he'd left well alone, left it to her to prove she did mean to reform and to find her own way of meeting Bruce Wayne, she might well have quit crime then. His meddling in fact made sure she wouldn't.

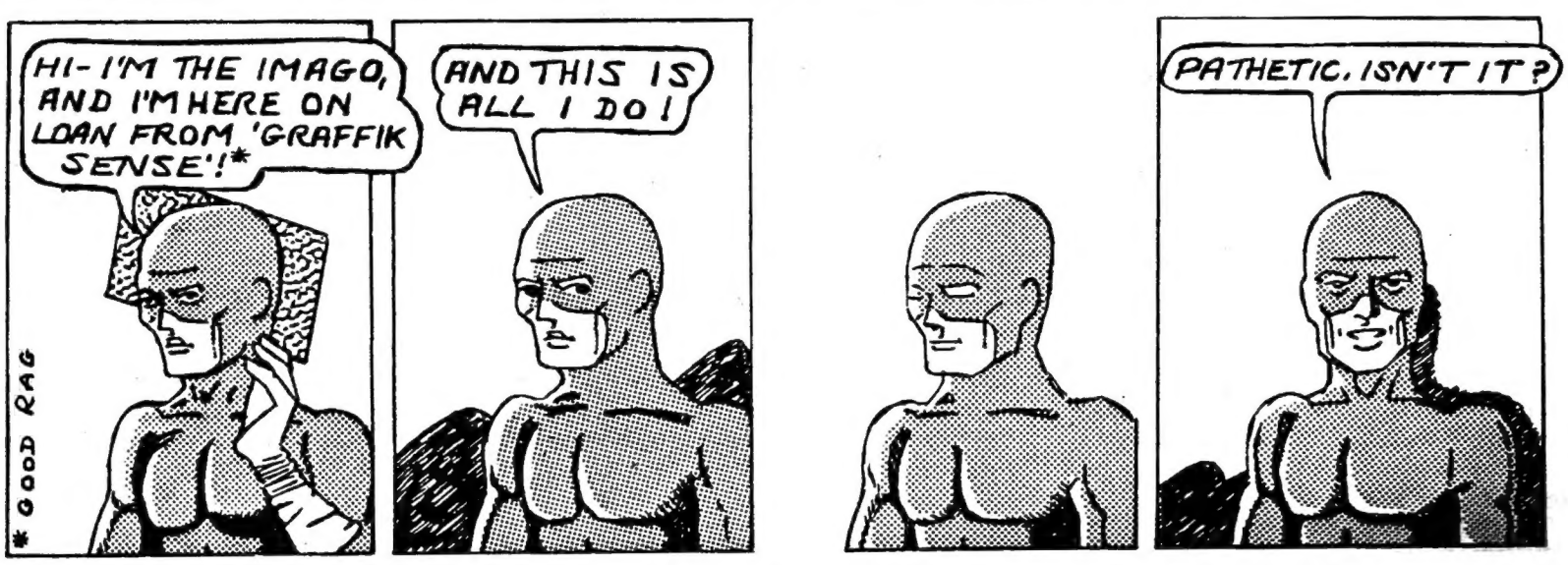
After her recovery from amnesia she functioned effectively as a superheroine three times, albeit having to work undercover. Batman the great reformer was, on two of these occasions, eager to believe the worst of her. He accurately perceives (they are rather alike, after all) that she feels a lack of excitement in her life. He doesn't think of the simple answer of suggesting that she goes in for being a superheroine. This cannot be excused as misguided protectiveness -- he knows damn well just how capable she is. She who would give him a fight can tackle almost any other foe.

All in all--he doesn't want her to reform. Oh, his intentions are of the best; consciously he may. But his subconscious makes him rather try to push her into being the Catwoman. The villainess.

So matters stood until recently. What motivated her latest reformation? Is it a reformation? And why did she turn to Bruce Wayne for help? To take the last first--she has been attracted to Bruce before, and she blamed Batman, not him, for that fiasco. But a strong possibility exists that she knows he is Batman. She could have guessed, or deduced it, or instinctively known. Then there was the occasion during an adventure with Batgirl when she actually unmasked Batman. Batgirl had, however, smeared the upper half of his face with paint (without looking herself, God knows how), and we are asked to believe this deceived Catwoman. Even if it did, he was unconscious for quite some time. Long enough that she could have done her old beauty parlour routine on him, and produced a Bruce Wayne mask.

Has she really reformed? For a time, I toyed with a theory that she had developed a mental block like the Riddler, in her case caused by her failure to seduce Batman. She can't commit crimes unless she seduces Batman first. She knows he's Bruce Wayne, see above, so she decided that seducing Bruce would do. Only when she had, it didn't work--seems he has to have his cape and cowl on. (No, nothing else. Just his cape and cowl.) But on more sober reflection, I think she is genuinely trying to go straight. Why? Perhaps her encounter with the Huntress, and the hints the Huntress let fall, gave her a notion of what her life could be, if she reformed.

The latest news, as I write, is that a new series of cat-crimes is to hit Gotham. Will have, by the time this sees print. "Whale" Morton back? Brother Karl with a relapse? Selina herself in a schizoid state? There are hints it may be the last. And if it is, who drove her to it? There is this fellow called Bruce Wayne, with a very unusual hobby, who is given to taking Selina to parties at airports where shipments of Egyptian cat-god relics are expected. Who gives fancy dress parties with collections of jewels on display (remember how she started out?), and encourages her to dress as Catherine of Aragon. A simple suggestion that Anne Boleyn would suit her colouring better (oddly enough, Spanish Catherine had red hair and blue eyes, English Anne's were black) would have sufficed. Who takes her to the theatre--to see "Cat On A Hot Tin Roof" (he should have insisted they went to see "101 Dalmations" instead). Who still, whatever he tells himself and the world, doesn't in his heart of hearts want his dearest enemy to be anything other than -- the Catwoman. -KATHLEEN GLANCY



Reaction

Dean Smith

Well, that Dez Skinn seems like a nice enough chap! Actually, while I realize that a large part of Dez's job is to promote the good image of Marvel UK, and a lot of what he says must be seen in that context, it was still a good interview with some interesting insights into the comics publishing world. It was also such a pleasant change from the usual egotistical self-aggrandizing claptrap to be found in many of the interviews run in The Comics Journal. A number of "big names" interviewed by that magazine give the impression that they believe themselves to be the only person in the industry who know anything at all about comics. These were people (writers & artists) I once admired --now I doubt if I would cross the street to speak to them. In fact I might cross the street to avoid them! Not that Dez is a lily-white knight in shining armour of course. The fact that his comment about not wanting to be an independant publisher is completely negated by the news item about the shake-up shows that. I can also remember Dez charging £3 for Warren's "The Spirit" #1 when it was only about 3 or 4 months old--so that makes his opinion of how commercial-minded dealers have become a bit invalid as well.

Brian Bolland seems like a nice chap as well. How good to read a letter from a pro that is not carping or boasting or making excuses for his own work, but rather an insider's view of how well a fellow artist has executed (no pun intended) a piece of work. Makes one proud to be a Brit...

I see that Reaction contains a couple of "first-timers" again. If I were cynical I'd say that this has become editorial policy (not that that would be a BAD thing), but if you are getting concise, witty letters like those from Lillian Edwards (no relation to Nige I hope) and Bill Thomson (any relation to D.C.?) from first-timers I can see why my own misspelt, rambling and usually late missives have been left out of late, but I will comment on a couple of points they raise.

Like Lillian I sometimes find those lists of initials confusing at times. Perhaps a compromise would be to write the name in full the first time (i.e. The Society of Comics Enthusiasts), and the abbreviation (TSOCE) for the rest of the letters page or whatever. /(An excellent idea -- if we can remember!)/

Bill, as well as echoing my own thoughts on the cents/pence centslessness, has also put his finger on what's been bugging me about Judge Dredd, and a couple of other characters that won't come to mind at the moment. Not that I've read many of the Judge's stories, or anything in 2000 AD. I now realize it was that very amorality that Bill speaks of that put me off. And I would take up a point with you here, Mike. Surely 'amoral' means "without a moral code". One is either moral in the accepted moral code of society (Superman, Captain America etc), or one has one's own moral code (Conan, Tarzan etc), or one has no morals whatever, which makes one amoral. What do you mean by "external morals"? Surely all morals are rather how one acts in the world according to one's inner dictates. What does one do with these "external morals"? Wear them on the head? Plant them in the garden? or fly them on the end of a piece of string? /(I must admit that I misread my Concise Oxford, which stated that amoral meant "unconcerned with or outside morals". I didn't notice the "or". In saying Dredd was amoral, I meant that he'd evolved his own set of morals (c.f. Tarzan, Conan etc) and was unconcerned with the external morals which society has constructed.)/

It was ironic, Mike, that you should mention the "completist syndrome" (something I have just got out of for the very reasons you mention, lack of space and the realization that it's not necessary to have a complete run of even a short-lived comic to appreciate it), only to have a classic example of it on the review page. So Nige Edwards has a complete run of STAR WARS, but doesn't read it (or even see the movie). Now, I always thought he was a nice sensible chap as well, so perhaps he could tell us all why he has this compulsion to buy a comic he's never going to read.

Roger Lyon

Regarding Margaret O'Connell's letter, I was really surprised at the 'reaction' my letter received from her, as really the remark was made in all innocence (ho ho), and just the way I felt about the differences in style between Kathleen Glancy's and Maureen James' articles; Bem-27 was all the better for the absence of Katholicity, which I always thought of as a very 'libbish' column, no matter what the content was. You could tell it was written by a female.

With regards to Dez Skinn, I hope he can pull off the return of HOUSE OF HAMMER as a sister magazine to STARBURST, and I also hope it's better distributed this time...perhaps by Comag.

Pete Scott

I enjoyed the Dez Skinn interview. I found it entertaining and, up to a point, quite informative. And since I've never regarded Dez himself as a 'nice guy' (not that I've ever met him, you understand), I got a kick out of Kev F. Sutherland's illoes as well. Unlike most fan humour, they managed to be genuinely funny for most of the time.

Dez's reference to the old 'Maxwell Hawke' strip gave me a real buzz of nostalgia. I can still dimly recall thrilling to Hawke's adventures many moons ago; he was a kind of psychic investigator who went around with a girl sidekick called Jill Adair, solving endless haunted house mysteries. The illustrations, presumably by this bloke Eric Bradbury, were really top-notch, done in a moody 'film noir' style. The same artist also used to draw the original 'Charlie Peace' strip at one time, as well as a series about a character called Jack O'Justice, who was really just Hawke in a Dick Turpin-type period costume. Gad! Isn't it funny the things that stick in your mind? I don't care a toss about the Dan Dare revival, or the 'Eagle' cult, but I'd very much like to see Hawke stage a comeback. A big hard-backed edition of the original stories would be just great. Hawke was forever discovering sacret passages in gloomy old houses, battling animated suits of armour

and falling through trapdoors into cellars full of spikes. Ahh... nostalgia...

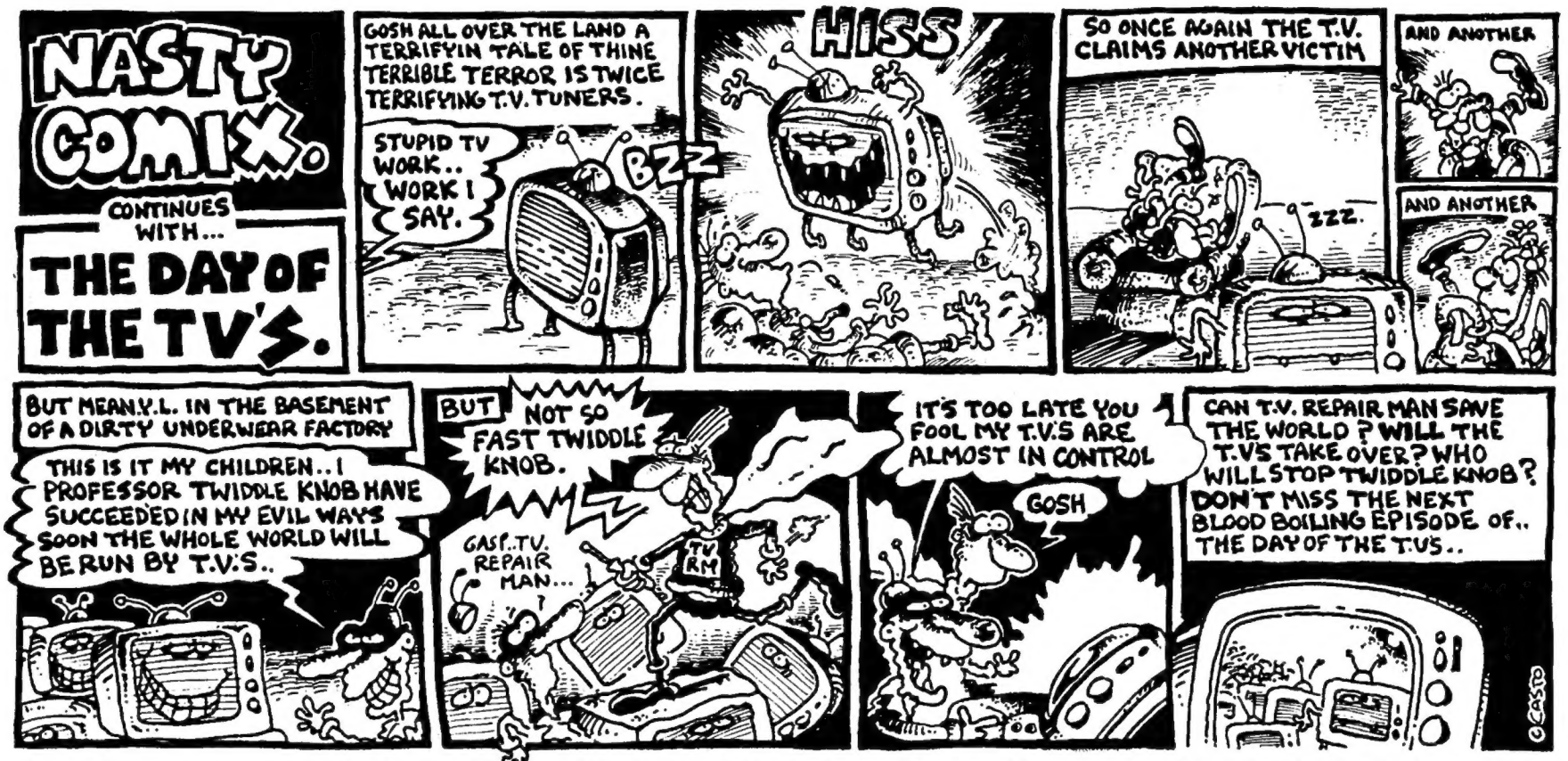
On the same subject, I recently read a book called "Boys Will Be Boys", by E.S. Turner. It's all about the old 'penny dreadfuls' & old boys' papers and comics. The stories it deals with all have titles like "Geralda the Demon Nun", "The Life and Adventures of a Stammerer", and (best of all) "Joanna Polenipper, Female Horse-Stealer, Footpad, Smuggler, Prisonbreaker and Murderer"!

"...almost every paper carried a serial describing the invasion of Britain by Germans, French or Russians," Turner writes. "Wellnigh every tramp, ice-cream vendor, organ-grinder or muffin man turned out to be Sexton Blake, and every self-respecting football team had a mysterious masked centre-forward."

Turner slips up badly towards the end of the book, when he deals with the Power Comics boom. He names the main Marvel heroes as Flame Man, Stone Man, Smoke Man and Rubber Man, and describes their powers: "Flame Man, crying "Flame on", turned himself into a torch, shrivelling everything except his own briefs, Stone Man, apparently put together from builders' waste, could take anything on the chin--or anywhere else... The body of Rubber Man served as a catapult and his arms were infinitely extensible, and Smoke Man dissolved when cornered..." Apart from this lapse into inaccuracy, "Boys Will Be Boys" is an ace book, and should interest fandumb at large. Penguin publish it.

The illo by Luke Rainford at the top of page 16 obviously depicts the dreaded Foo bird of the Andes, which goes around shitting on people. You can't wipe the shit off or you die. If you want to survive, you have to go around with it on your head for the rest of your life. The moral is: If the Foo shits, wear it. (I stole this gag from 'Yellow Dog'.)

I agree with Margaret O'Connell, who feels that seeing a drawing of a naked woman or reading a dirty joke may be damaging to a younger reader, Mike. I learnt about sex by listening to dirty jokes in the school playground because my parents were too embarrassed to tell me themselves. I'm OK now. I'm fortunate enough to enjoy a very warm and fulfilling relationship with a beautiful girl. But I went through a lot of pain, doubt and confusion when I was a little younger. No Fun. /(I would imagine that every adolescent goes through what he or she feels is a lot of pain, doubt and confusion, but I doubt that the degree of his or her troubles is dependent upon the number of dirty jokes they've heard, or "dirty" magazines they've seen, or whether they have had any sex education, which usually consists of how babies are made and the physical effects of puberty. If sex education included such facts as the mental effects of puberty, and the harmlessness of masturbation, then your point would stand firmer (!!). Surely, the degree of your pain and doubt depends largely upon your mental make-up, which, in turn, depends upon your physical make-up.)/


NASTY COMIX.
CONTINUES WITH...
THE DAY OF THE TV'S.
GOSH ALL OVER THE LAND A TERRIFYIN TALE OF THINE TERRIBLE TERROR IS TWICE TERRIFYING T.V. TUNERS.
STUPID TV WORK.. WORK I SAY.
BZZ
HISS
SO ONCE AGAIN THE T.V. CLAIMS ANOTHER VICTIM
ZZZ.
AND ANOTHER
AND ANOTHER
BUT MEANY.L. IN THE BASEMENT OF A DIRTY UNDERWEAR FACTORY
THIS IS IT MY CHILDREN..I PROFESSOR TWIDDLE KNOB HAVE SUCCEEDED IN MY EVIL WAYS SOON THE WHOLE WORLD WILL BE RUN BY T.V.S..
BUT
NOT SO FAST TWIDDLE KNOB.
GASP..T.V. REPAIR MAN...
TV RM
IT'S TOO LATE YOU FOOL MY T.V.S ARE ALMOST IN CONTROL
GOSH
CAN T.V. REPAIR MAN SAVE THE WORLD ? WILL THE T.V'S TAKE OVER? WHO WILL STOP TWIDDLE KNOB? DON'T MISS THE NEXT BLOOD BOILING EPISODE OF.. THE DAY OF THE T.V.S..
©CASTO

Graeme Bassett

Thanks for Bem-27. A male on the cover yet again, and within Reaction we've got your typical humourless American feminist wailing about the sexist Brits. I've got to admit that I've lost all sympathy with the feminist movement recently... I really believed all their crap about "If women were running things we'd see an end to all this war-mongering", and now Thatcher's in and she's furthering her bigotry against the Russian race by using this Afghanistan storm in a teacup as an excuse.

I mean I've never been a fan of the Olympics, but I really don't see what all this crap's about. Nobody gave a screw about Afghanistan being a Russian stooge-state, so what's all the fuss about? My, things certainly are more cut-and-dried in comics. For instance, look at Boisterous Bill Mantlo. In the beginning there was a happy socialist mass of plastic, and lo, there came the Japanese exploiter caste, and Baron Karza cursed the Micronauts with selfish individuality. It's easy for me to snipe at Mantlo, but really Martin... have you been messing with his letters or something? I mean, surely the poor little devil isn't so naive as to believe that a "critic" must either like or dislike a piece of work wholeheartedly. I think one of the things which separates critics from reviewers is that they're prepared to look for the good points in the lowest dross, and vice versa...

I mean, the burning question in my mind is...is Mike Cruden a token American? I mean, he deplores racial humour, and does not like jokes about homosexuals, and now this Female-human-sociologicalwise-storm trooper has arm-twisted poor Mikey into admitting that another area of humour is not quite on. /(It sounds good, but unfortunately isn't true. I twisted the arguments to prove I'm still allowed to laugh unashamedly at every filthy joke.)/

What does he say? "I think the case for women to be exempted as humorous targets is different from that of blacks and homosexuals because many people have little if any experience of the latter." Hmmm, my immediate impression of Mike's current home-town is one of an NF stronghold where flak-jacketed heavies man the boundaries in case a black pansy tries to enter the borough... I think this entire proposition of Mike's is a bit of a loss since we all walk around with our eyes closed...BUT? I'm sure Reaction will be buzzing with theories on how pooves really do behave like John Inman, and Pakis really do cook Corgis for supper...I think the fact that Freud attempted a lengthy dissection of humour proves what a dead loss humorous analysis really is, and I'd dare to suggest that only one rule applies with humour, to wit: it's funny until it happens to you. /(Until the day when we can alter our colour, sex and sexual inclination at will, that rule doesn't help when deciding the pros and cons of humour aimed at minorities. (Do women consider themselves to be a minority group?))/

The Dez Skinn interview was a little disappointing when you consider how good the cover was. I'd hoped it might include more comments on Dez's fan-press days, and the stuff he wanted to get on to--"How I managed to get Mills and Wagner away from IPC." Skinn comes off as a much more interesting speaker than interviewee, and I'd suggest that perhaps Adam could have stayed off the business side a little. On the other hand, I resent the Lee/Skinn line that fans aren't interested in business. It's part of the bull that's turned me off comics in the last year...on the one hand the folks at Marvel try to excuse the overwhelming creative bankruptcy with Chris Claremont's cry of "It's a business it's a business!" but the moment we ask just what the "business" has to do with the crappyness of today's comics, we're given the stock Stan Lee line, "Oh, fans aren't interested in business." Anyway, the whole pretty situation's weird. A few years ago Dez Skinn was, or seemed to newcomers, an integral part of fandom--and all of a sudden he's a much reviled outsider...weird.

Howard Leroy Davis

An attitude permeates British fandom which to my outsider's view is most strange. Briefly, it is this: "Anything created or published by the British for the British is crap, and anything created or published by Americans for Americans is of value". The statement is subject to qualification, but it frames the British fan attitude quite accurately.

The Marvel price mark controversy is symptomatic of this; an even stronger indication is the fact that British comics are not sold at British Comic Conventions. (Colin Campbell's contemporary British offering is the only exception I know of.) French comics are sold...and, of course, American. I searched in vain for COMIC CUTS at your Eleventh Comic Art Con (an American collector wants Weary Willie & Tired Tim)--asking for COMIC CUTS brought strange glances from you British dealers.

Admittedly, yours is a relatively unsophisticated fandom. You are about five years behind American fandom in delving into the esoteric. Barks versus other duck artists; the grossness of L.B. Cole covers; the passion for Good Girl Art; the appreciation of early Captain Marvel; these are nuances which have not yet reached the average British fan...and, in fact, may never reach him. No great loss if you are not interested in American esoterica...but why no interest in your own comics?

It's not because British comics lack creative value. Some are quite good...not all, of course. But bear in mind that 90% of American comics are crap, too.

Creators...artists, writers, editors... always work on various levels. They create for kid consumers, and/or for fellow professionals, and/or to please themselves, and/or for the adult-parent readers.

Barks did not become popular in America until extensive research on him and his work was published. The same is true of Good Girl Art, although there was always a minor cult (of perverts?) involved with this genre.

The point is this: You have a lot of value in British comics. Seek and ye shall find. Admittedly your publishing formats make British comics even more difficult to collect than American, but that obstacle should make the goal more rewarding --it probably will make your good stuff even more expensive than ours, since it will be rarer!

Meanwhile, re-examine DANDY and BEANO; check out your old copies of BATTLE and ACTION; and save the COMIC CUTS for me. And, more importantly, research into who created your old comics, and how, and why... /(It is indeed the format of the British comics which makes them so unattractive; that for two pages of Bellamy or Lawrence etc you're going to have to endure 10 pages of dross. Until the one artist & concept comic appears, I think British comics will be largely ignored by most British collectors.)/

John Dakin I enjoyed Bem-27 as much as usual, and thought that using a horror-style cover was a nice idea. /(Letters often provoke a wry smile from this cons. ed., or even a silly grin, but John's opening remark is the first to provoke outright laughter!)/

As to why the American fan press are able to write more skilfully and perceptively than any of us, I wouldn't know, but what I find more worrying is that few historical or biographical articles are even attempted over here. There seems to be a preponderance of letters and interviews, although that's not to say that they can't be as entertaining as, or more entertaining than, a sustained analysis of one subject. It does seem a shame, though, that such articles are so rare in this country. I for one would very much like to see in-depth pieces on such British talents as Brian Bolland and John M. Burns. Surely a Frank Bellamy history is long overdue, as is an "Eagle" retrospective. It's quite remarkable that no British fanzine has as yet taken a critical look at the first 3 years of 2000 AD and its creators. The Americans have even beaten us to that, with an illustrated (partly in colour) 6-page article by Mike Gold appearing in the March 1980 issue of FANTASTIC FILMS. /(Which is an American competitor to STARBURST, not a fanzine; so the piece in AD ASTRA ≠5 would be the nearest British equivalent... -ML)/

Also, newspaper strips have always been neglected by fandom, although the promised Martin Asbury interview for the final CMNI (whenever that is) will help to redress the balance a little. If a number of fans set out to write only one article each on one of their favourite subjects, we might be able to partially catch up the years that American fandom is ahead of us. Personally I've had a go at three long articles of the kind "involving extensive research", and as you've said, Mike, these are much harder to write than letters, and can be particularly exhausting (and frustrating when the editor throws them back at you to make amendments and updates), but I wonder why America has more fans willing to undergo the mental torture that this entails. Even if we're not on the same intellectual level as the Americans, we've still got to go past the first step of at least <u>trying</u> to write thoughtful articles. /(One problem may be that fans feel that many of the more interesting subjects have already been written about (e.g. Frank Bellamy was spotlighted in a couple of old Fantasy Advertisers, and there was an entire issue of a fanzine, "Ultima Thule", devoted to "Eagle"), but that doesn't preclude anybody writing about them again, since each individual writer will flesh out the bare bones of history according to his own prejudices. Ahem.)/

Howard P. Siegel During my 15 years of panelological activity, I've witnessed the birth and death of many fan publications. Very few reached a dozen issues, especially those from outside the United States. The reason for the latter's short-lived existence is obvious. There has never been enough nationally originated material of acceptable calibre to warrant the sizable audience needed to attract local publishers. The American comics are cheaper for them to print, and of superior artistic quality. This has been the case since the 1930s. It's no wonder that zine editors find themselves strapped into devoting most of their efforts towards Marvel and DC. Bem, however, has avoided that sort of pitfall.

Further, by giving your readers a goodly number of pages to sound off, British fandom has the opportunity to acquaint themselves with each other and determine the pulse of the comic book scene. Although this was once the common practise in the United States, less and less "letters to the editor" appear nowadays; and then, usually by the same group of people.

Next point. Each issue of Bem offers a different selection of features. This variety takes the "rote" out of Bem's personality. Also, your regular contributors are afforded the luxury of not having to meet a constant deadline. This dreaded onus often requires sacrificing literary quality and statistical accuracy in research. In my early writing years, I would have been disappointed if my column missed a single issue of RB-CC; but having stepped out of that fast-paced mainstream, I'm hopefully in a better position to please my audience.

Bem has received fine ratings in the review sections of U.S. zines, calling it the finest now available in Great Britain. I agree.

/(Usually I edit out all the praise and congratulations for Bem, though it's still very rewarding for Martin to read them, even if they don't see print--but I think if I'd put any black lines through this letter, Martin would have made a personal visit to Manchester expressly in order to break my black pen into 127 different pieces, or worse.)/

Ivo Jerry Steyn What about Warrens? Well, I would like to know why Warrens are not covered in the news section, for a start. I use the news section as a buyer's guide of coming comics, and since I seldom or never see Warren news featured, I never know what's going to happen next in those mags. This is most unpleasant, since the acquisition of a Warren over here takes weeks of vigilance. That may be different in Britain, but I still think a lot of people would appreciate knowing what's coming from Warren. Did everyone know CREEPY ≠113 was an all-Wrightson issue? How many of you would have liked to know?

Exactly the same goes for Heavy Metal, and the various graphic novels. Although the latter get some occasional coverage, usually when they are nothing but ordinary comics published by some other publisher. But this is just touching on a huge area of creativity I think a lot of us would like some regular info about. /(I agree. Is it possible, Mart? Doesn't TCR include info on Warren and Heavy Metal?)/ /(Not usually, Mick; however, if the Bem news section does expand, that's one area I'll certainly try to work on. -ML)/

About Neverwhere: I can't shake the feeling that Corben could have made "Den" perfectly acceptable to the comics code without sacrificing the quality of the book. This makes his decision to do it the way he did rather suspect. Another thing--does everyone know Corben is doing coloured versions of "Rowlf" and "The Beast of Wolfton" for Heavy Metal? /(I think the violence and sex (e.g. Ard's attempts to seduce Kath, the Queen's seduction of Den) were integral to Neverwhere, that it would have been just a plot with pretty pictures if it had been expurgated. What is it that you suspect.)/

A small note about underground strips. They do not exclusively feature drugs, sex, and rock & roll (loud cries of, "In that case, who cares?"). In fact my favourite, Wonder Warthog, seldom becomes code-violating. Any other fans of the Hog of Steel out there?

Bill Thomson: Judge Dredd is neither amoral (unconcerned about external morals) nor immoral (contrary to morality). He is consciously non-moral. He does not presume to make ethical judgments about other people's actions because he realizes all value-sets are personal and non-absolute. He may possess internal standards for "right" and "wrong", but he knows they are no more than personal opinions.

I find this attitude a lot more refreshing than the fanatical labelling of actions according to personal standards for right and wrong that are no more Absolutely Correct than the Code of Thieves (Arabia, 1500 AD) is. I would like to see my children develop the same philosophy.

Finally, my compliments for Ruan Lanihorne's taste. (I wonder if he has this hidden urge to become Editor instead of the Editor?)

Dave Harwood Bem-27 was another good'un, albeit somewhat less enthralling than 26 for reasons I am not quite sure of. However, I confidently predict Bem <u>will</u> (deservedly) win this year's Eagle Award, and about time too.

I think possibly my reservations stem partly from the Dez interview, which was rather too long to sustain my interest. This is not a reflection on Dez himself, nor the questioner (although I think Dez was correct in trying to steer the interview away from too great an emphasis on business matters), but mainly because my interest in the activities of Marvel UK is minimal, going on non-existent. Had the promise shown in HULK COMIC been sustained, i.e. more new strips by British artists/writers, perhaps I would be more enthusiastic, but personally I think the only thing of note to come out of Marvel UK is the Mills/Wagner/Gibbons Dr Who strip. I'm very much looking forward to the Marvel USA version.

And speaking of Gibbo, I'm glad you managed to persuade him to get off his backside and do something for a fanzine again. A nice cover; I admire and respect that man's work a lot.

Thundermole continues on its own winsome, weirdsome way (note the alliteration there), oblivious to all the praise or criticism directed at it. Indeed the man behind the strip remains as mysterious as his creation. I especially liked the clever way ol' Thundy switched the hammer from his left to his right hand in mid-swing; I'm sure Terry's Dada must be very proud of him (you can groan now).

I remain unconvinced by the merits of your 'centrespread' I'm afraid, though it was interesting to see just how badly Rich Buckler draws when he doesn't have his swipe-file handy.

Reaction seemed a little less heavyweight than in the past few issues, but nonetheless remains the highpoint of the zine. As Brian noted, with the winding-down of the Thrillkill and cents/pence debates we do appear to be without a central theme at the moment. Still, I'm sure something will come up. Maybe Margaret O'Connell's delightfully silly letter will spark off some comment.

Female American comic fans do seem to have an awfully low opinion of their male counterparts, don't they. I don't know how justified that may be, but it annoys me when they also apply these sweeping generalisations to British fandom, about which they know nothing at all. If fandom were indeed a "lonely hearts' club" then the vast majority of us must, presumably, be homosexual since -- with the notable exception of Sue Reece--it's only in the last few years that there's been any

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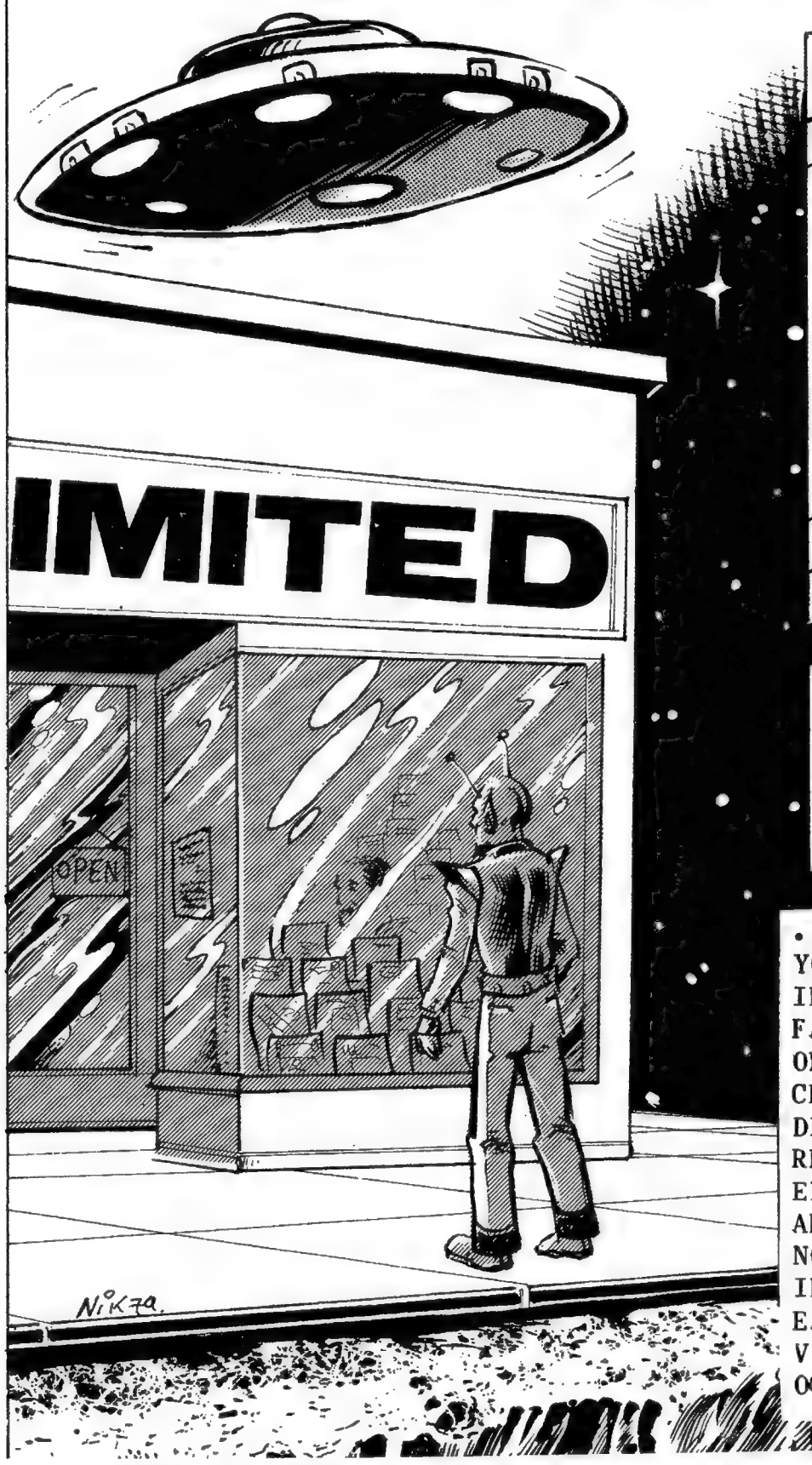

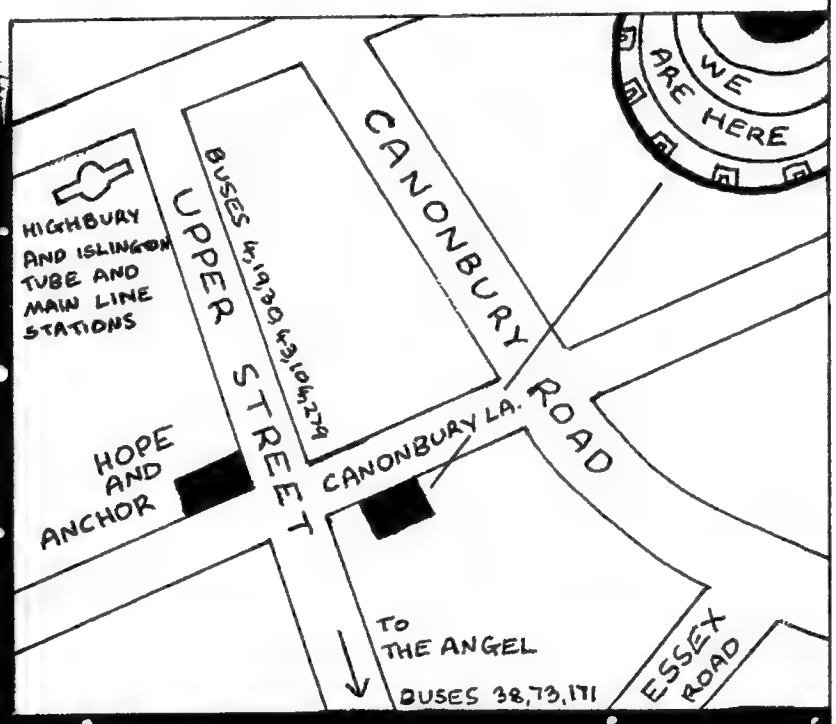

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evidence at all of a female presence in fandom. However, whereas Ms O'Connell's ignorance is excusable, her arrogance--her ability to arrive at solid conclusions based on minimal evidence, such as her remarks about Mo James--is less tolerable. But Maureen doesn't need me to put her case.

I tend to agree with you, Mike, about "dirty jokes" in general. Specific examples I might find objectionable, or more likely simply childish, but it wouldn't be because of any sympathy I might have for Women's Lib. Similarly I can see no reason at all why a drawing of a naked lady (or a naked man for that matter) should cause anyone offense, especially where there is nothing overtly erotic about the picture--which there wasn't in the case of Kelly Pye.

Neither do I believe that such drawings necessarily denigrate the status of women, or indeed even make a comment on it. It might be an indication of male fascination with the female form, but I can't see anything wrong in that. In fact I have little doubt that this sexual aspect is one of the reasons artists, myself included, enjoy drawing naked women. It doesn't explain why many female artists also seem to prefer drawing women, but I don't think Margaret would accept any kind of explanation based on the more abstract aspects of the appeal of the female form. The fact is that women are, among other things, 'sex objects'. They are also far more than that, just as men are, and it is because I accept this that I personally feel no guilt, or need to apologise, when I illustrate this facet of the feminine persona.

I have no time for the strange mentalities that presume female nudes automatically imply that women are "merely" sex objects, whether that reaction is prompted by chauvinism or feminism. And if you wonder why I've prattled on so long about this, it's because nudes or semi-nudes could well crop up in forthcoming "Conqueror" episodes, many of which may well be "gratuitous", so I thought you ought to know now where I stand.

As for the difference between pornography and art, well, according to Senator Rosewater (from Kurt Vonnegut's "God Bless You, Mr Rosewater"), "...the difference between pornography and art is bodily hair!" It's intriguing that the illo of Kelly Pye, pubic hair and all, caused such a fuss, whereas Russ Nicholson's topless ladies in Bem-26 elicited nary a ripple of discord. Hmm?

Note to Lilian Edwards: don't for gosh's sake apologise for being a DC fan. The Marvelites of this world aren't arbiters of taste whose views must be heeded--they just don't know any better. Funnily enough, despite what I said a couple of issues ago about the current Marvel product being generally more interesting than DC's, I still buy more DCs than Marvels (it's about 2 to 1 in fact). And for much the same reasons as Lilian, except that I was collecting DCs for a couple of years before there even was such a thing as a "Marvel comic". I have far more affection for the long-standing DC characters, and maybe this allows me to tolerate a lower quality level in their comics than I do with Marvel. I mean, I just couldn't care less what Peter Parker or Reed Richards are up to these days.

Incidentally, I don't think any possible feelings of alienation that lettercols can engender are restricted to new fans. Not long ago Mo James lent me a pile of Comics Unlimiteds, a fanzine I had never picked up on, and I felt very much as though I was coming in on the middle of a conversation between strangers. Still, I suppose it's not quite so intimidating for me as it might be for a total newcomer, but I hope it wouldn't put anyone off for long. Heck, as Mike said a while back, Reaction uses any old rubbish. They print my letters, don't they?

Addendum to the Bem Ballot: was that a serious proposition about a page/price rise, Martin? If so I for one would be all in favour of it. When I first came across Bem (with #17) I found it an enjoyable but rather light read; since then it has grown and matured a lot, and has become easily my favourite fanzine. I agree with Mike about the lack of a British equivalent of The Comics Journal, but don't think it's because of a lack of literary talent or whatever, but rather a lack of opportunity. This is especially true with regard to the formal article, with modern fanzines tending to rely more heavily on regular feature columns. Now I like formal articles, especially, like heavy ones, man (I also like writing them, but don't often get the chance), and any possibility of Bem including such on a regular basis, with the kind of talent Bem can attract, is to be encouraged. Always assuming that was the direction you were thinking of taking Bem in, of course.

Whether or not Mike wants to see in British fandom the kind of vitriol served up in such as TCJ, notably the reviews, I dunno. I'm certainly not sure I want to see it, stimulating though it may well be.

This was meant to be a short letter, for a change (!), but it seems to have rambled on longer than I meant it to. As such a reiteration of my views on comic art will have to wait for another time. /(No, I wouldn't like to see a British version of the savage, downbeat reviews and criticisms TCJ specializes in. (Hell, I've ended a sentence a preposition with!) Although those reviews may be a reaction to the gushy praise Marvel have had lavished upon them in the past, and the present to some extent, I still find that "vitriol" an example of the childishness even TCJ fans have to grow out of. (Done it again!))/

Mike Taylor — I do wish that people like Barry Winetrobe and his ilk would stop thinking up new ways to flood fandom with thousands of new members -- I mean, is it all that desirable a goal? The most noticeable effect fandom's growth has had up to now is that comic prices have shot through the roof. Now I'm not saying that we should adopt a snobbish, closed shop attitude, but I just can't see what good it would do fandom to have wholesale increases in buying fans. Certainly, fandom will never be large enough to effect any change on an editor's policy on a comic, so maybe Barry, or yourself, Mike, could enlighten me? /(A vastly inflated fandom is most zine editors' favourite fantasy, with the increase in revenue, possibly even a profit (!!!), which might result from lots of new fans. The attendance at marts and comicons would be better, allowing the organizer to increase the table fees and use that extra money (plus the extra from the entrance fee) to lay on more and better features. Prices probably would rise, but not by an extreme amount, otherwise the comics would be priced even further out of reach than they are now, bearing in mind that we're talking about an influx of young adolescents. Also I feel that new blood is always beneficial, perhaps essential if fandom isn't to give up the ghost.)/

Mike, by draughtsmanship I was referring to the technical maturity of an artist in the convincing representation of anatomy, vehicles, scenery etc. I don't include panel arrangement and continuity in this as these are more examples of design than art. One can be a competent and imaginative designer without being a good artist, and vice versa.

Apologies to Chris Ash for inferring that he's a snob, though I still don't think that the casual dismissal of "all the new Marvels and DC's" is justifiable. I wonder what his teachers did to him at school to make him loathe and detest them so? His ever-so-slightly sarcastic remarks regarding the "teacher mentality" and "scribbling-red-biro-in-the-margin" were a little uncalled for. I returned to school recently (to see old friends etc) and was totally stifled by the hostile and over-disciplined atmosphere. The majority of the staff continued to treat me as though I was still under their discipline; they couldn't relate to people on any other basis, but this just comes with the job, I suppose. It hardly applies to all teachers, and I hope Mike remembers when he's facing his class at school that the people who write to Reaction are sometimes the same age as those whom he teaches, all of which are individual people, capable of thoughtfulness as much as they are of thoughtlessness. /(Current primary-school teaching theory advocates the "child-centred" model of teaching, underlying which is the philosophy of eschewing the idea of "the class", and relating to and teaching each child as an individual, which, in an unstreamed class, where I.Q. ranges from 70- to 120+, and reading ages range from 6 to 12+, is the only valid method of teaching, and that's the first and last time I'll ever talk shop in a fanzine.)/

I see that the subject of "fan apathy" is present again. Sigh. It recently reared its ugly head in MoI too, in reply to which Theo Clarke gave me his opinion on the subject, which I wholeheartedly agree with -- can't we stop whining and moaning about the number of people involved in fanzines and get on with what we're here for, to discuss fantasy, comix and art? If the number of people in fandom bothers you then leave. Better to have a fandom full of constructive, positive people than a lot of moaners. No wonder not all that many people are interested, they want to know about comix and all we ever seem to talk about is bloody apathy. Nuff said? /(Haven't you just become guilty of what you've been complaining about?)/

And lastly, as one who is extremely interested in Art history, and art in general, I find it a little sad when I see people making passing comments about comics being an "art form". To at least half of these people comics art is the highest form of artistic expression (and I bet you can't tell me where that last phrase comes from). Actually, comics are not an art form in their own right, more a destructive merger of prose (which suffers most), art and design. I've got a beautifully laid out argument for this point of view sitting next to me, but the length of this letter is becoming somewhat prohibitive as it is, so I think I'll wait to see if anyone even cares before I send it. /(If somebody consciously merges two or more media to produce a new medium, isn't there inherently an art of creation in there somewhere. I think comics are an artform, but the qualities which make it an artform (continuity, draughtsmanship, symbolic illustrations, economy of story) aren't those which most of fandom appreciates. Most fans lavish praise on individual illustrations, characterization, dialogue, plot etc, all of which can be bettered outside the medium. It's in the amalgamation of all the above that the comics medium comes to the fore.)/

Maureen James Very many thanks for Bem #27; I must say I enjoyed the Dez Skinn interview, especially the parts by Kev F. Sutherland ...and, no, I am not being catty about Mr Skinn--OK.

But on to my favourite part of Bem at the moment; Reaction. I too would like to see an analysis of why comic fans became comic fans, Mike -- but who would conduct it? I can't somehow see a non-comic fan being impartial, and I don't know any Sociologists in comic fandom, so... My reasons for my hobby? Easy, I enjoy it and I've always had the tendency to collect things --perhaps I have squirrel tendencies?!? And, before you ask, no, I've never tried to analyse why I enjoy it. However, I have often wondered how many comics fans also collect other things such as records etc, and if so, what is there in their make-up which makes them such avid collectors? /(Basically, collectors are people who don't throw things away. Do you think there is some psychological reason for this, such as insecurity? Must there be something lacking in the child's "real world", for him/her to "retreat" into collecting? And why comics? Is this a further escape from reality?)/

I do like the idea of sending out MAGUS with Bem, at least to some people--the first ever personalzine in comics fandom, isn't it? Phil's writing style is always entertaining, and he manages to pack quite a lot into a limited number of pages. Also, I hope Phil has realised how much he has done to encourage we 'comic-sniffers' to come out of the shadows; however I would like to bring to his attention this warning: never sniff reprints. They can have a bad effect on you and may even (in extreme cases) turn the sniffer on to SPIDEY SUPER STORIES! So be warned. And on that note I had best close, and go back to amusing myself with all those lovely old comics ...if you think the smell of old Marvels are something you should try Eagles...

Alastair Mabbott I'm at a loss as to which part of his anatomy Mike used to blurt out that bit about American fandom, The Comics Journal in particular, being so great and years ahead of us and all that. What's so good about TCJ? I got a hell of a bigger thrill out of saving this lowly British Bem from suffocation and devouring every meaty word, than reading the professionally-produced TCR and TCJ with their full-colour covers. The aforementioned zines seemed very sterile and empty, and were certainly impersonal, a fate that I would hate to see overtake Bem -- it hasn't so far, I'm glad to say. /(In The Comics Journal 47 (chosen at random), there were articles on the Invaders, Eisner's Spirit, 50's superheroes, future trends, Steve Englehart, plus in-depth reviews of Ghost Rider and Starlord. And I mean real articles, not plot synopses or padded lists of heroes or villains, but articles in which the whys and wherefores of popularity, failure and change were discussed. The only article I can recall (after pausing to think for a whole 30 seconds) even approaching that standard in Bem is Alan Cookson's First Kingdom review. I see no reason why the perception of TCJ can't be combined with the fannishness of Bem.)/

The Dez Skinn interview was very informative, and changed my mind about a lot of things concerning "Dez The Knife" (Kev Sutherland's cartoons were superb--lots more from this lad). His comments on the changes he made to British Marvel, and the reasoning behind them, vindicated him--only for him to plunge back into my disfavour with his remarks on some artists, and room for artistic expression in comics. Does Dez really think artists like Adams and Wrightson produce such good -- yes, I'm calling it good, not self-indulgent -- artwork because they "want to be celebrities at conventions"? Had the thought not occured to him that maybe they produce good artwork because they are good artists letting their true style show through? Dez says "Comic books can't afford such fine pieces of work...anything beyond that is totally self-indulgent." All comic books, or just mainstream ones? I'm sure Dez realises there must be an outlet for creative

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graphics in the medium, certainly somewhere in the mainstream business.

Dez also claims that She-Hulk will make more money than Epic. Well, sure, there's no guarantee that Epic will succeed, but when you consider that Heavy Metal grosses as much money as Superman, Spider-Man, JLA and X-Men put together (information courtesy Les Chester), you can't help wondering if maybe Dez's far-famed business sense is up the creek.

Steven J. Green — In answer to Dez's open question, the main reason I don't pick up LOOK-IN on a regular basis is its appalling juvenility; the strips usually read worse than the shows they're based on, and in the case of BATTLESTAR: GALACTICA, no way can the art alone inspire me enough to dig into my pocket and buy a copy. The action, what little there is, is tediously repetitive, and the use of cliché catchphrases like "My Stars!" et al whenever the hero blunders into his weekly dose of 'suspense' is straight out of BOY'S OWN, via DAN DARE. I may be in a minority, but I happen to put a lot of emphasis on decent scripting when I'm deciding which comics to buy. Sure, stylish art is a great plus, and is certainly going to attract the average fan initially, but whether or not I go out of my way to buy that comic again in the future depends on my overall enjoyment, and visuals just aren't enough. Look at the British equivalent of the superhero strip, JUDGE DREDD --the only constant factor in its make-up is John Wagner's script. The art is always changing, from Ron Smith's gritty realism to Mike McMahon's impressionistic stylism, but this is only a variance in the visual interpretation of highly characterised action-adventure. Fan readers may agree over the moral issues at stake (Judge Dredd: supercop or superfascist?), but surely there can be no dispute over the reliability of the scripts. No cardboard clones here, even if J.D. is a little uninspired of late, too wrapped up with its own macho popularity. Aside to Mike: you're dead right about Dredd's amorality /immorality. The guy is a 23rd century Harry Callaghan, only with the society around him changed so that the previously unacceptable might-is-right attitude is now as matter-of-fact as sliced bread or the grim realisation that CROSSROADS is here for good. Dredd is the man in the street's ultimate wish-fulfilment, just (within the framework of their particular legal system), independent (the Dirty Harry syndrome) and undaunted by power, money, or authority -- the law (and its defects) epitomised. In many ways, Dredd is the authoritarian parallel of Roger Zelazny's classic creation, DAMNATION ALLEY rider Hell Tanner, even down to the motorbike. No way can he be accused of being amoral; it's just that the moral attitude he lives by is different from our own. Dredd would no more accept concentration camps than I would, but he would find it difficult to perceive the grey areas of right and wrong (law & chaos, to paraphrase Moorcock) that exist between that kind of evil and, let us say, the cancellation of the aforementioned soap opera. Moral myopia, curse of the living law.

Margaret O'Connell may not have meant them that way, but I found her ramblings on your implied sexism in sending her a copy of Bem a welcome relief from an otherwise unamusing day. I mean, since when has generosity been sexist? Like, when are the cliché minorities going to realize that they're never going to be "equal" as long as they keep rabbitting

on about sexism, racialism, etc whenever some jerk makes a crack about them. As for strips like Terry's causing mental harm, is she really serious or just griping for the sake of it. I was going to make some comment about her appearing to have a compulsion to get things off her chest, but no doubt she'd take it as a sexist crack. Which it would be, so there...

Anyway, I must sign off now; I've got to finish inhaling a few old MIGHTY WORLD OF MARVELs before I leave for tonight's meeting of Comic Sniffers Anonymous. Nothing like home grown, right...?

Kathleen Glancy — Alas for Steve Grimshaw, She-Hulk seems to tend to rip off her trousers rather than her shirt -- come back, Steve, calm yourself, she always wears a long white T-shirt which covers her essentials. She must have a supply of long white T-shirts rivalled only by her cousin's collection of purple trousers and Reed Richards' 100 pairs of stretch socks.

Ivo's brief comment on Wolverine is odd. I mean, you wouldn't meet Wolvie in real life. Something like him might possibly exist, but would be locked up in Broadmoor heavily tranquilised. Moreover, I hope and trust that the real Canadian government would have more sense than to render a homicidal maniac of a type who is extremely difficult to control more capable of killing than nature made him. Mind you, I have no confidence at all that the Canadian or any government if they found a homicidal maniac who responded to orders readily wouldn't recruit him--but a real-life Wolverine, with his attitude to authority, never.

And Brian Bolland misses my point on the Wolverine question. It wasn't his killing that bothered me -- it was the way his supposedly sane colleagues (including one who is supposed to have such reverence for life she is prepared to give her own to save some total, and proven to be hostile in the past, strangers) do not so much as speak a word of reproof to him about it. None of those pictures are like me, Brian. Nobody knows what I look like. Heh heh heh heh heh. Except, maybe, the Shadow. And thank you for describing me as truly kind. It isn't true, but thank you anyway. I won't disillusion you by disclosing my plan for luring Chris Claremont to Edinburgh on the pretext of giving him an award, putting him in a spiked barrel, and rolling it down Arthur's Seat (which is what we call the mountain Chris calls Edinburgh Crag; but we only live here, so what do we know?) to pay him out for the various insults he has put upon Scotland.

I am highly perturbed at the slaughter not only of Iris Allen but of several other female supporting characters--Batwoman and Sharon Carter to name but two. The one that I would like to see dead, Aunt May, has of course come back to hover on the brink for another 20 years. Ugh. And now they are threatening the Catwoman. I've got rather fond of her in the course of researching my article on her, and if they kill her I will be very, very annoyed. Though not as annoyed as Batman will be. Look out, Wein! Was that the sound of an interdimensional transporter? Who is that dark figure following you? He's nearly on you...he's...oh dear, he's been arrested by intolerant policemen on a charge of loitering with intent and being dressed like God-knows-what.

Dave Wishart — Thanks for another nice issue of Bem, sporting a very hefty Reaction; and yes, Mike, it is nice to see the professionals take time out to reply to fans. After all, all they need do is collect their pay cheque and go home...

Although very bold and eye-catching, I didn't like the cover, although it seems the obvious one because of the good and lengthy interview. This was offset by the centre pages...mmm.

Now, Reaction. Well Steve Grimshaw, re Neal Adams, I just got out the Adams X-Men issues and the Supes/Ali treasury, and after a quick perusal I've got this to say: for the X-Men, the main impact, apart from Adams' superior ability to draw from models and photos (take it from me, as a trained graphic designer, this is by far the most effective way, one lesson you learn is always to draw from life; even if a spaceship is an evolved candelabra, don't make things up. Are you listening, Ditko? There is one major drawback, however, in that it takes much longer--hence Adams' rep for missing deadlines) was the impact from the panel layouts, which were worlds away from boring boxes, and which went out of favour because it confused the ten-year-olds. Funnily enough, Gene Colan also had this problem with Doctor Strange when he first got his own comic after Strange Tales split in '68. Add to this Neal Adams' wide variety of facial expressions, and his competent handling of machinery and explosions (given wide airing in the Sentinel bash highlighted in X-MEN #99 by Cyclops saying "Compared to the Trask sentinels, this model's a walking joke!"), and you have a living legend for Fandom. Of course, as with all heroes of the day, sooner or later someone's going to turn round and say, "Aw, man, Adams' rep is overblown."--look what happened to Howard the Duck, and listen to the murmurs starting about the X-Men. Make no mistake, we're lucky Adams did so much in comics, considering the way the industry treats its employees.

As for the Supes/Ali thing, Adams worked wonders with a plot that was clichéd 20 years ago. Still showing his nice handling of machinery and big bangs (pages 22, 23 and 12, 13), his splash pages not losing detail by being blown up to treasury size (pages 25 & 38)... As for panel layout, he's held himself in check shape-wise, concentrating on superimposition and characters bursting through the panel frames -- but not by much (pages 48, 62 & 63). Where did Steve get to know that Adams did his own inking in X-Men 62? I couldn't find the credits in my copy, and

the X-Men G & T Index isn't out yet, is it? Was it in an Adams Index? Despite the occasional putter-down of Adams, he is still held in some respect; after all, just look at the prices dealers charge for his issues! /(There's an index in the Neal Adams Treasury which credits Tom Palmer with inking all the Adams X-Men issues; while I'm not a very good inker spotter, the Palmer trademark of using mechanical tones (i.e. letratone, zipatone) leads me to agree with them! -ML)/

She-Hulk isn't a marvellously new and inventive thing to think up, is it? What's next, Stan? Invisible Girl in her own mag, titled The Fantastic Two, no doubt? The Dazzler--well, she didn't seem interesting enough in X-Men 130 to deserve her own comic. It's the old "We're only doing it for the money" story.

Am I the only person to be impressed by "Alien"? /(Nope, I too thought it was a brilliant film, very well done, and certainly the most suspenseful film I have ever seen. In other suspense films, such as "Psycho" and "Jaws" (yes I know it was very funny, but it was also very terrifying), there are moments when you know nothing nasty is going to happen (when the protagonists are away from the house, or the sea), but that's not true here. The spaceship must be the ultimate in claustrophobic settings. Excellent stuff. Shortly after seeing "Alien", I went to see "Star Trek". Sigh.)/

On to Dave Harwood. Certainly I agree with him about the fact that Planet Tale wasn't drawn with fanzines in mind; it's done very much with an IPC/D.C. Thomson look about it. I feel that it could be reduced more, allowing more per issue--at the moment it has too much white space. In fanzines I'd prefer something that isn't seen in U.K. comics, like Thundermole, or Angus McKie's "Swordspell" in Fantasy Advertiser (remember?).

It's great to hear from Bill Mantlo. Wouldn't it be nice if we got more feedback from the pros working in Merrie Olde Englande. (God knows what the American comic fans think of GB as portrayed by Marvel and DC.) Incidentally Bill, as a fan of continued stories, thanks for an entertaining 11-parter. Entertainment is what it all comes down to, after all.

Richard Burton Wearing my hat as co-organiser of the Eagle Awards, I am writing to clarify a point that appeared in the interview with Dez Skinn published in Bem-27, and which has probably been misinterpreted by the majority of your readers.

In the interview, Dez, at one point (page 11), gave the impression that he had received five Eagle Awards. This is not true.

Of the five Eagle Award certificates which Adam Pirani saw displayed on Dez's office wall at Marvel, only two were actually won by Dez himself--for House of Hammer and Starburst, which were voted "Favourite British Pro Publications" of 1976 and 1977 respectively.

Due to a lettering mix-up on the certificates for the 1976 awards, Dez and a few others were presented with badly lettered certificates on the understanding that, at a later date, they would be replaced with certificates of a better quality. When these were sent out, we asked the recipients to dispose of the earlier certificates...for reasons best known to himself, Dez decided not to do this, and to display both versions of the same certificate on his office wall. This of course creates the impression that he has more awards than he really should.

The other two awards seen by Adam were

won by Marvel UK for Captain Britain, who was voted "Favourite British Comic Character" in 1976, and for Chris Claremont, who was voted "Favourite British Comics Writer" for his work on that comic in the same year. It is perhaps unfortunate that Dez Skinn's predecessors at Marvel UK did not see fit to pass Chris Claremont's award to him as we, the organisers, had hoped.

With the Eagle Awards acquiring more and more prestige every year with publishers and creative people both here and abroad, Mike Conroy and I are very anxious to keep the awards free from abuse by any individual or organisation seeking to misuse them for self-promotion.

M.M. Forrest I feel moved to comment on the lack of women comics fans, a theme that seemed to thread through several of the letters in Reaction last time. I can't say I find Maureen James' explanation terribly convincing. The answer seems, to me, so blindingly apparent that I can't understand why no-one has mentioned it previously. There are very few women comics fans because all mainstream comics are vehicles for male fantasies: written and conceived by men, for men. This is so self-evident that I should not need to elaborate. However, I will make two further, related points about women and their representations in comics.

First, I admit that two or three women writers have -- cautiously -- emerged in mainstream comics (leaving aside undergrounds which, with their suggestions of social subversion, are another matter). Maybe something will come of this recent phenomenon, but I doubt it. On the whole comics are a solid bastion of conservatism. Secondly, I have heard it asserted that female fantasies are now being catered for by such characters as Red Sonja, Ms Marvel, and Spider-Woman. Mostly, this is rubbish. All of these characters--though I can't deny that a somewhat misguided attempt has been made--are manifestations of traditional male fantasies and sexual stereotypes. Ms Marvel and Red Sonja are more ball-crushing than emancipated. And Red Sonja's ludicrous steel bikini, combined with Frank Thorne's lecherous art! Likewise, as Pete Martin pointed out, SPIDER-WOMAN stories seem to take a rather unsavoury delight in near-bondage, etc. Laudable gestures to women's equality have been made, but only feeble gestures, and always within the confines of traditional male-orientated fantasy.

Given this, it's no great wonder that the number of women comics fans is so small. I question Cat Yronwode's implication that there are more US women fans --in number, no doubt, just as there are many more male fans. If a survey could be done, I suspect the results would show the proportion of women to men fans is much the same in Britain and America. And yes, as you must surely have guessed, I am a woman comics fan--one of about four, to judge from your letters page--and no, you can't have my 'phone number. However, if there's another fancy dress disco at next year's Comicon, I'll certainly attend --it sounds like I could have the time of my life! /(You've just doubled the potential attendance figures for the con.)/

And now for something completely different. I would like to remind Kathleen Glancy, with regard to the X-Men, that there have probably been very few new fiction plots since the Middle Ages. If she wants to inspect weak plots, then I would direct her attention to recent issues of DETECTIVE. I realise that this is slightly off the centre of the point; however, so is Kathleen's analysis of the motive for the Scott-and-Jean-think-the-other-is-dead plotline. Chris Claremont's main intention, I imagine, was to get the new, Cosmic Phoenix off the scene for a while, and within that context, I think the device worked reasonably well. Also, I can't see how having an un-simpering love affair with Scott destroys Colleen's credibility as a character. Don't Samurai ever go in for pleasures of the flesh? In general, I feel it's a mistake to take comic stories overly seriously, and to forget their inherent limitations. If Chris Claremont had been writing a book, no doubt he would have tidied up discrepancies in the plot and expanded on the characterizations. However, he was writing a comic instead, in which plots and characterizations are bound to be sketchy. X-MEN is a very superior comic, and it deserves credit as such. I wish people would start jumping off the bandwagon full of 'zine critics who pan the comic because it's not the Great American Novel. Surely there are more worthy targets for Kathleen's scrupulous criticisms?

Enough. I'm sure you'll receive many more eloquent and outraged letters from devoted X-Men fans. I enjoy reading Kathleen's column, even if I can't always agree with her.

Finally, I would like to see more articles in Bem on British talent and comics ventures. The high percentage of "pass" votes in the British section of the Eagle Awards only highlights the need for someone to direct fans' attention to the few worthy native productions. I personally would like to know more about the writers, artists, and editor of 2000 A.D. -- such as Ezquerra, Grover, McMahon, etc -- and about the Graphixus/Brainstorm lot. Was your reply to Michael Goldstein's letter in Bem-26 an open invitation? If so, give me the authorization and the address and I will make haste to interview Brian Talbot and produce a lead feature for you. I can't wait to get started! /(You have the technology, you have the authorization --but do you have the money to get to Preston? With two long interviews already to hand for upcoming Bems, there's really no great hurry to buy your ticket as yet, though; but keep in touch! -MC & ML)/

MADE IN AMERICA

THE SILVER AGE OF AMERICAN COMIC BOOKS
by Howard P. Siegel

1947. The war was over. The entertainment-starved military were returning to civilian life. On the home front, it was a return to normality, and things that reminded no-one of the previous five years. Paper rationing had ended, as did other limitations on scarce commodities.

The comic magazine industry faced a dilemma in the form of uncertain readership desires. The resulting experiments to seek solutions caused some previously well-established publishers to retire; it also gave new ones the incentive to try their luck. In doing so, a furore was created in the early fifties that changed the course of the comic book establishment.

The super-hero was out. He had no reason to exist. His enemies had been defeated in Europe and the Pacific. Westerns, romance, crime, aviation — these were the new themes. If one or two such titles were successful, everyone jumped on the bandwagon. For an example, a list of titles beginning with the word "crime" and their publishers follows:

CRIME AND JUSTICE	- Charlton
CRIME & PUNISHMENT	- Lev Gleason
CRIME CAN'T WIN	- Atlas
CRIME CASES	- Cornell
CRIME CLINIC, THE	- Ziff-Davis
CRIME DETECTIVE CASES	- Hillman
CRIME DETECTOR	- Timor
CRIME DOES NOT PAY	- Lev Gleason
CRIME EXPOSED	- Atlas
CRIME FIGHTERS	- Atlas
CRIME FIGHTING DETECTIVE	- Star
CRIME FILES	- Standard
CRIME HORROR & SUSPENSE	- Region
CRIME HORROR & TERROR	- Region
CRIME ILLUSTRATED	- E.C.
CRIME INCORPORATED	- Fox
CRIME MUST LOSE	- Atlas
CRIME MUST PAY THE PENALTY	- Ace
CRIME MUST STOP	- Hillman
CRIME MYSTERIES	- Ribage
CRIME ON THE RUN	- St. John
CRIME ON THE WATERFRONT	- Realistic
CRIME PATROL	- E.C.
CRIME REPORTER	- St. John
CRIME SMASHER	- Fawcett
CRIME SMASHERS	- Ribage
CRIME SUSPENSTORIES	- E.C.

Most lasted no more than three years. At best they were cannon fodder for Dr. Wertham. The romance genre fared the same — but lent a note of humour by the titles themselves, which included DEAR LONELY HEARTS, GIRLS IN LOVE, CAMPUS LOVE, BRIDE'S DIARY, BOY LOVES GIRL, and ACTUAL ROMANCES.

The westerns derived much of their subject matter from the movies; almost every screen cowboy had his own title, even Andy Devine. Some of the old line of WWII comics eased their formats and titles into this category; NPP's ALL AMERICAN became ALL AMERICAN WESTERN, and featured in its run Johnny Thunder by Alex Toth. Even the illustrious ALL STAR turned cowboy after the Justice Society bowed out in issue 57 in 1951, and showcased such features as the Trigger Twins, Johnny Thunder, and one of the early Indian superheroes, Super Chief, forgotten by that famous incompletist, Maurice Horn, in his recent book about western comic strips. M.E. devoted a large part of their product line to westerns. A few of the more popular ones were GHOST RIDER (resurrected two decades later by Marvel), Frazetta's WHITE INDIAN, and TIM HOLT/RED MASK. The stable also included a gal, the masked BLACK PHANTOM. Some historical heroes had a varied career; for example, Kit Carson was bannered by Avon for 18 issues between 1950 and 1955, then moved over to NPP for 10 issues from 1955 to 1956 without missing a beat. He was also in some Fiction House presentations during 1954 — KNOCKOUT ADVENTURES comes to mind.

Some titles were far reaching. Avon had a specimen called KING OF THE BAD MEN OF DEADWOOD. Al Williamson and Frank Frazetta cut their teeth, so to speak, on westerns. Their contributions to Toby's JOHN WAYNE and Famous Funnies' BUSTER CRABBE have made both titles collectors' items. One of Marvel's few experiments in 3-D was the premiere issue of TALES OF THE WEST. And of course, who could forget CHIEF VICTORIO'S APACHE MASSACRE from Avon in 1951? Certainly the aforementioned Frazetta and Williamson, who contributed to it.

But unusual titles were part of the era. There was IT'S GAME TIME for four issues during 1955-56, IT'S A DUCK'S LIFE for 7 issues in 1951 (from Marvel/Atlas — perhaps the ancestor of Howard?), and HILLBILLY COMICS by Charlton. Then there were the oddities. INDIANS ON THE WARPATH contained no cowboy or indian stories. MY SECRET STORY became SABU THE ELEPHANT BOY in 1950.

Fawcett was heavy on sports. In 1950 alone, one-shotters were issued starring Jackie Robinson, Don Newcombe, Larry Doby, Ralph Kiner, Roy Campanella, and boxer Joe Louis. Baseball championship teams received their due also, as the THRILLING TRUE STORY OF THE BASEBALL GIANTS (1952) and THE BASEBALL YANKEES (1953) sought to garner purchases by baseball fans. There was a plethora of short-lived sports comics. Famous announcers lent their names to the title, such as Bill Stern. Harvey issued BABE RUTH SPORTS for 11 issues during 1949-51, and who could forget Will Eisner's BASEBALL COMICS starring Rube Rooky. I was sad when the Spirit's creator did not fulfill the back page announcement in the titles's Spring issue, when the World Series issue (number 2) never became a reality.

3-D comics became a sudden hit, and died just as suddenly when young readers found the red and green lensed paperboard glasses too unwieldy to manipulate. And if you already wore prescription glasses, forget it! Nevertheless, nearly every major and some minor publishing houses put out 3-D comics. Every field was covered, from super-heroes to funny animals. Some of the more notable ones were NPP'S BATMAN, which was reissued 13 years later in 1966 during the TV craze. There was a Simon & Kirby original for Harvey, CAPTAIN 3-D. He came out of the Book of Id as the last survivor of his world, to battle the usual S & K assortment of villains from ganster-hooligans mixed up in a nefarious construction racket, to a female tigress/human responsible for the eradication of his people. Ten issues of ACG's ADVENTURES INTO THE UNKNOWN in 1952-53 had some stories with 3-D effects in them, including several Williamson entries.

The "Cold War" with Russia and the Korean War had everyone nervous but the comic book publishers. They at last had a subject matter to work with. By this time Timely had become Atlas, and devoted a lot of their printing schedules to war themes. Between 1951 and 1953, they came out with a dozen titles, including three "battles" — BATTLE ACTION, BATTLEFIELD and BATTLEFRONT. Other notables were the classical Kurtzman FRONTLINE COMBAT from E.C., NPP's DANGER TRAIL starring King Farraday (later to be reprinted in SHOWCASE as I-Spy), Fawcett's lone entry before leaving the industry, SOLDIER COMICS, and a bunch of G.I. titles including G.I. IN BATTLE, G.I. JANE and her boyfriend G.I. JOE and all the other G.I. SWEETHEARTS. The advances in atomic technology, especially those which made science fiction a reality allowed Ace Periodicals to give readers two issues of WORLD WAR III and St. John five of ATOMIC AGE COMBAT in 1952.

Enough material about EC has been written to allow every panelologist a familiarization with the Gaines empire, and the horror genre in general. But his were not the only titles of note. There were many short-lived offerings from just as many second-rate publishers. Even the bigger houses had difficulty in acquiring consumer appeal. Harvey's CHAMBER OF CHILLS, Atlas' ADVENTURES INTO TERROR and ADVENTURES INTO WEIRD WORLDS were some of the few that lasted for more than 30 issues. Other publishers, such as ACG decided to avoid the negative publicity by toning their stories down or relegating the plots toward science fiction. Students of art techniques and styles have often said that horror books of this period contained the worst drawings to go along with the unsavoury stories.

But what about the superhero? As I said previously, the tempo of the times opened the door for his return, but surprisingly, only a few entries emerged. Some were good, but regardless of this, all were soon put back into limbo until SHOWCASE 4 arrived. A summary of the era would be incomplete without a thumbnail sketch of some of these costumed adventurers.

ME's THE AVENGER was typical. After an origin issue badly drawn by Dick Ayers, art for the remaining three was by Bob Powell. Non super-powered, he sought revenge against the communists who killed his Army colonel brother by using gimmicks and gadgets in a Batman-style belt over his red and white costume, and flying a VTO/L jet plane he called the Starjet. The Avenger showed his stuff primarily in East Germany and Russia. He fought The Player in a giant-sized gameroom, resisted the attacks of a giant octupus and shark while caught in the grips of an enormous clam undersea, and pretended to be a visitor from the planet Mars while in pursuit of the enemy. In London he regained a stolen H-bomb; and in a Stateside adventure he prevented spies from stealing a purple beam ray that dissolved metal. In each story he displayed unusual dexterity, and acrobatic skill — he was an early Daredevil (Marvel style), using Batman's apparatus.

For four issues, Sterling's CAPTAIN FLASH used his atomic power sparingly. His origin was to be used repeatedly by others. Professor Keith Spencer, atomic scientist, became the victim of an experiment when a tube of radio-active cobalt was dropped — and its rays saturated his body. He was soon to learn that he had acquired great strength, could resist extreme temperatures, and had steel-hardened flesh once he clapped his hands together. He acquired a young sidekick named Ricky, who happened upon his secret in the typical Simon & Kirby manner. Captain Flash fought several super-villains. He pursued The Iron Mask through six puzzles in which he encountered a giant cyclops, hypnotizing sirens, monsters, and great waterfalls. The Mirror Man was a tentacled monster who emerged from a mirror and attacked victims, sucking their body fluids. He barely escaped when the good Captain turned himself into an atomic fireball. The Black Knight rode a jet propelled V2 glider, and with a horde of "knight errants" robbed jewelry stores and banks wielding lance and shield along the way. The Actor used makeup and costume changes to do his evil thing. Captain Flash traveled to deep Africa in an effort to discover why low-grade uranium shipments were coming into the U.S., only to be faced with prehistoric

monsters existing behind a huge wall of ice. He even got into a fray with outer space invaders, and found himself captured in an underground city policed by giant robot insects. Each issue had three Captain Flash stories and one featuring Tomboy, a costumed girl in the same vein as Little Boy Blue from Sensation Comics.

And then there was the inevitable Simon and Kirby red, white and blue (and yellow) creation. For seven issues, Harvey treated us to a merry romp, if not a downright series of parodies, from this team. Just a partial list of their adversaries will give the tone of the career of this hero and Speedboy, his mandatory junior sidekick: Round Robin, movie producer Shepard Shoestring and director Eric Von Junkheap, enemy agents Gnortz & Bohltz, Doubleheader (with one body and two heads), mad scientist Von Feygel, communists Yuscha Liffso Long and the tough female Rhode Island Red, Mutt & Jeff type spies Hotsky Trotsky and Poison Ivan, and Mexican revolutionary Yafata, nee American Harvey Nibble. With his acrobatic skill, strength, and straightfaced humour, this book was a pleasant respite from the other comics of 1954-55. Cancellation of this book was one of the real disappointments of the time; would-be artists still swipe his costume.

Finally, we have Charlton's NATURE BOY, their first superhero. Done in parts by John Buscema and Dick Giordano early in their careers, this boy was gifted by the Gods of Mount Olympus with the powers of wind, fire, water, and other elements. His stories were short-paged and un-spectacular; he appeared for three issues in 1956, just as the modern age of comic books was beginning.

Many of the WWII publishers were coasting toward oblivion during this period. Besides watering down their stars, and eventually cancelling them, as MLJ did when they had Archie and company supercede the likes of the Black Hood and the Shield in Pep and Top Notch, they tried new ideas. Quality offered THE BUCCANEERS for 16 issues between 1948 and 1951. Prize had Simon & Kirby producing BLACK MAGIC in 1950, eerie stories some of which were reprinted by National Periodical Publications when Kirby spent three years with them in the early seventies. Dell had a flying cowboy in FLYING A'S RANGE RIDER, no doubt inspired by the Sky King TV programme. Radio and TV, incidentally, were represented by such as MY FRIEND IRMA for four years, and MY LITTLE MARGIE for eleven.

But what about the likes of NPP and Marvel? In 1950, NPP launched two titles that were to last for many years, setting a tone of quality which allowed them to be reprinted several times later for equally appreciative audiences — I refer to MYSTERY IN SPACE and STRANGE ADVENTURES. The first became the home of prize-winner Adam Strange, the second fostered Captain Comet for 39 early issues. He was to return in the mid seventies. Likewise, the PHANTOM STRANGER's first series appeared for six issues in 1952-53, and he also returned first in his own title once more, and recently as a guest star or a team-up partner. TOMAHAWK was another long-term title. STAR SPANGLED became STAR SPANGLED WAR STORIES, as the likes of the Star Spangled Kid & Stripesy, Guardian, Newsboy Legion, and finally Robin the Boy Wonder gave way to the G.I.s. There was also OUR FIGHTING FORCES and REX THE WONDER DOG to compliment the eternal Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman — which was better than the nine issues of ALAN LADD, or the likes of BOB HOPE and DEAN MARTIN & JERRY LEWIS and SGT. BILKO. SHOWCASE started weakly, but then became what its title promised, a showcase for some of the Justice League's greats plus other costumed heroes. Likewise did BRAVE & BOLD via team-ups, after the viking and knights in armour genre ran

its course.

Marvel, still known as Atlas, tried their hand with MARVEL BOY, which became ASTONISHING offering work by Ditko, Krigstein, Williamson, Heath, Krenkel and Morrow. Joe Maneely's BLACK KNIGHT was neatly done, and when reprinted in MARVEL SUPER-HEROES received much favourable comment from the new generation of readers. In 1954, still not discouraged by Marvel Boy's failure, Marvel tested the potency of their three biggies from the forties, Captain America, Human Torch, and Sub-Mariner, in MEN'S ADVENTURES 27 and 28 as well as YOUNG MEN 24-28. The stories presented watered down versions of the familiar heroes. The Human Torch, subdued by gangsters and buried underground at Los Alamos, came to life when the test atom bomb was exploded. Captain America was not the Steve Rogers we knew, but a school teacher He had been a keen student of the WWII hero, studying his every adventure and duplicating the Dr. Reinstein formula to become a neo-Captain America. He and a new Bucky battled the communists, while the real Captain America slept on in his block of ice. This 'masquerade' was only revealed (or the 1950's Cap adventures explained) in 1972 in a 4-part adventure conceived by Roy Thomas and scripted by Steve Englehart, when side-effects of the 1950's formula turned the stand-in Cap and Bucky into psychotic killers, fighting the original Captain America, who they took for a late-coming imposter — naturally, the original Cap triumphed. Most of the Sub-Mariner adventures of the 1950's by Bill Everett were tales of Namor's youth, with Namora making frequent cameo appearances. The rest of the line was too terrible to mention, although Jack Kirby, now solo, worked with Stan Lee's scripting as preparation for the successful "Marvel Age" to come in a few short years.

Charlton got its start by taking over characters from other publishers who were biting the bullet -- or the dust. Fawcett was a favourite donor; they turned over Tex Ritter, Don Winslow, Ibis the Invincible, Nyoka the Jungle girl, while from Fox came Blue Beetle, starting in reprints for SPACE ADVENTURES numbers 13 and 14 in 1954.

Ajax-Farrell was interesting only because that publisher purloined the names of previously popular superheroes, and stretched their few issues over long periods. For instance, SAMSON took 5 years to unfold in 3 issues; SWIFT ARROW had one issue per year. THE FLAME was not the star of Fox's WONDERWORLD COMICS; but ROCKETMAN, WONDER BOY and PHANTOM LADY were the real thing. P.L. had appeared in POLICE and FEATURE COMICS for Quality and her own title, and All-Top for Fox before landing in PHANTOM LADY and TERRIFIC for Ajax. Her notable achievements were the suggestiveness and the scanty dress, courtesy of Iger Shop graduate Matt Baker; her most recent assignment has been with the Freedom Fighters for DC. Wonder Boy, created by Jerry Iger, made in and out single story appearances as a filler for the superhero titles. The Black Cobra stories were reprints from CAPTAIN FLIGHT COMICS of 1945-46; this character scored a first by wearing trunks over his jodhpurs. . .

Miscellaneous notes: Siegel & Shuster's first work away from NPP was their ill-fated FUNNYMAN for M.E. The masthead read "The Creators of Superman Present Their New Hero". This they did for 7 issues. Jerry Siegel also went solo for Toby Press when he scripted JON JUAN, replete with an Alex Schomberg cover that also managed to mention Superman. E.C. had an oddity in that GUNFIGHTER was originally Ed Wheelan's FAT & SLAT. It, in turn, became HAUNT OF FEAR in 1950 -- but the various re-titlings and re-numberings of **that** comics line could make an article all their own. During the book's early run "Ghastly" Ingels was in numbers 7-14, and the ever-moving MOON GIRL in issues 1 & 2.

The bad outnumbered the good in those nine years. The few bright spots were contributions by the longstanding, larger publishers. Historians have claimed that if E.C. is extracted, the whole era was indeed bleak. Some 25 years from now, the whole calendar of events may be revised, and what is now known as the 'Silver Age' may be retitled the 'Dark Ages'. Since history repeats itself, panelologists are well aware that the dawn arrived, and perhaps the most prolific era for American comic books followed. We call it the beginning of the 'modern Age': but that is another story. . .

The May DC releases include a good wide mix of material; GHOSTS ≠88, for example, includes a 6-page story drawn by Michael Golden, while SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE ≠24 has a neat little 3-pager drawn by Mike Nasser & Vince Colletta, as well as a delightful tale scripted by Elliot S. Maggin, a name we see much too little of in comics these days. as well as a very unusual history lesson by Bob Kanigher & Dino Castrillo, WEIRD WAR ≠87 includes a 6-pager drawn by Tom Sutton; newcomer Tom Yeates does some nice art for two short back-up strips in SGT ROCK ≠340; dollar comic ALL-OUT WAR ≠5 has a bitter story written by Archie Goodwin, "The Civilizing of M'Kala"; and HOUSE OF MYSTERY ≠280 has a tale featuring art by Val Mayerik and Danny Bulanadi. All these pleasant little surprises in one month makes it worthwhile to check through this sort of book!

BEST OF DC DIGEST ≠5 reprints DC's best ten stories of 1979, in 128 pages for 95 cents--or at least, the best stories that would fit! Since it includes strips from House of Mystery ≠267, Secrets of Haunted House ≠17, Jonah Hex ≠24, and no less than five dollar comics, as well as Action ≠502 and DC Comics Presents ≠10, quite a lot of material would be new to most people--and it's a good read, even if the fashion for finely-detailed art doesn't go too well with the half-size digest format.

It's good to see J. Hex in the "top ten" --and with a story quite the equal of the "Lieutenant Blueberry" albums. JONAH HEX ≠36, by Mike Fleisher, Dick Ayers & Luis Dominguez is another excellent issue; this has to be one of DC's most consistently good series.

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA ≠178 has a Starlin cover; now, if they could only get him to do the interiors as well! I agree with Mike Tiefenbacher in TCR ≠178 (what a numerical coincidence!) that this book needs some changes, particularly in the art department; there's no easy answer, but how about some experimenting, Len?

BATMAN ≠323, "Shadow of the Cat" by Len Wein, Irv Novick & Bob Smith, should allay Kathleen Glancy's fears concerning the treatment of the Catwoman--she's back in costume, but on the same side as Batman, as a surprise villain breaks cover.

The monthly DETECTIVE ≠490 has the 22-page conclusion of, presumably, Denny O'Neil's last Batman epic before his move to Marvel, drawn by Newton & Adkins; and, after Batgirl, Robin, and a short "Tale of Gotham City", can it be--the death of Black Lightning? What <u>are</u> Martin Pasko, Pat Broderick, & Frank McLaughlin up to?

GREEN LANTERN ≠128 contains the 12-page GL story done by Len Wein & Dave Cockrum for ADVENTURE when it was still a dollar comic, with a 5-page frame by O'Neil & Staton. Dave's art, as inked by Bob Smith, is rather reminiscent of Gil Kane on this book; nice.

And how 'bout LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES ≠263 as a last DC? It's still Gerry Conway scripting, but the new art team for "Day of Judgment", Jimmy Janes & Dave Hunt, is looking good -- worth watching!

I've given DC rather half my space, but as Marvel reviews out-number DC 7 to 2 in "Bemuscene", I wanted to even things out. It gets confusing when not only do the DC bi-monthlies date themselves a month ahead of the 40 cent books, but the Marvel black & whites are generally a month behind, but let's start with TOMB OF DRACULA ≠4, with an April cover-date, a Tom Palmer cover, and two stories written by Roger McKenzie --"Angelica", 37 pages long, drawn by Gene Colan & Palmer, and "Death Vow", 20 pages long, from John Buscema & Klaus Janson. Roger is wisely approaching Dracula with caution, using him as a menace, a lurking harbinger of death, rather than a noble lead character--and it certainly makes for a good old-fashioned scary story!

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT ≠6 re-tells & revises Star-Lord's origin, from Doug Moench & Tom Sutton; Doug manages to explain what "The Master of the Sun" was up to when he made Peter Quill into a Marvel-Universe Green Lantern...and the nature of his failure.

MASTER OF KUNG FU ≠88 shows, as usual, why this book has a fan following second only to Xavier's current class of gifted youngsters; "The Leopard and the Dove", by Moench, Mike Zeck, and Gene Day is the sixth part of the current Fu Manchu story --to be concluded next time! How Doug can keep so many people active in a story, and still keep them <u>real</u>, beats me...

ROM has gone non-distributed, I gather --no doubt the strip will appear in STAR WARS WEEKLY, or the new STAR HEROES pocket digest. Issue 6, by as ever Bill Mantlo and Sal Buscema, is as usual intriguing, with some promising situations. DEFENDERS ≠83 concludes the "Tunnel-World" saga by Ed Hannigan, drawn by Don Perlin and Joe Sinnott. There's even room for Valkyrie, Hellcat, and Nighthawk to appear on 3 of the 17 pages--but this book is very much back starring Hulk, Dr Strange, and Prince Namor again, as it used to. Will this get the sales up? Last year's figures don't put this book in the danger zone, but THE AVENGERS does sell 50% more copies...

And that's enough for this time; the rest of the titles I'd better save for my column in Graphic Sense, which I must get started on this very day! -Martin Lock

BLUE LAMP IS SHOT UP BY MACHINE GUN GORILLA. WHO IS TESTING HIS NEW BIRTHDAY PRESENT.
HEY-Y-Y-Y
HMM! GUN GOOD.
BLUE LAMP
TERRY MOORE
QUICKLY REPAIRING THE HOLES WITH HIS POWER RINGS, HE SPEARS THE GORILLA WITH STEEL HARD RAYS CAUSING THE PRIMATE SOME DISTRESS.
URK!
BUT MUCH TO BLUE LAMPS CHAGRIN, HE IS ARRESTED BY THE WORLD WILD LIFE PROTECTION ROBOT AND MAY HAVE TO ANSWER FOR HIS CRIME TO A HIGHER POWER.
THIS IS SILLY!
QUIET FOOL. OR DAMAGE TO PERSON FOLLOWS.

This concludes the interview of Rick Marschall conducted at Christmas Con '79 in Philadelphia on December 15th, 1979. The text, transcribed by Howard Leroy Davis, continues from the "sleazy peaks", as described in Bem-27, into the "verdant valleys".

The Toymaker Syndrome!

Rick Marschall: Marvel's been changing significantly in the past few months... Marvel has finally realized what Warner (DC) realized a few years ago--they're no longer a publishing company, they're a toy company... a licensing and merchandising company. They make much more money from the toys, licensing and merchandising than from the books, most of which lose money. And now that they've realized this, they have begun to pull back on certain titles.

It's really the main reason for the reversal on Epic. When Epic started out, it was to be a monthly and have a very high budget for advertising & promotion. We were going great guns on the basis of that... and on the basis of personal appeals, debts, and friendships. I got Frazetta to do the cover, and Corben to work for the magazine, and the Brothers Hildebrandt, and Isaac Asimov...a lot of good names. Then, suddenly, Marvel changed its attitude: Epic is now a quarterly, with very little promotion except in their own colour books with coupons. Big deal.

The idea finally came to them that with the superhero 40 cent books they pay very low rates; the creators sign away all rights to the work; and Marvel can endlessly print paperback books and reprint comics and sell overseas and do T-shirts and bedsheets... Just exploit the stuff endlessly. They pay low rates, and the production values are very low -- lousy paper, lousy inks, etc. But what they were being asked to do for Epic was to pay very high rates, use very good paper and everything--while buying only first-time printing rights. No way to exploit them and reprint them or sell them abroad...

Howard Leroy Davis: Or do T-shirts...

RM: Or anything like that. It's just counter to their new thrust. In a business way that makes sense, but...

HLD: The thing that worries me about what you're talking about is that, as a serious comic fan... (Is there such a thing?)... Anyway, as someone who is deeply interested in the story-telling media and the comic fantasies that are portrayed within it, I'm worried that once one is locked into the sort of attitude that you are describing, where one is a toy company and the licensing becomes paramount to the content of the comics, you're never going to realize the potential for proper development. That's why Superman's costume can never change--and also why Ms Marvel wasn't allowed to change until they found that she wasn't a viable licensing character in the first place. That sort of "tail-wagging-the-dog" system tends to kill the potential of the medium.

RM: That's true, up and down the line. At one end, you have different bosses; instead of editors and publishers, you have merchandising and licensing people in control. And at the other end it stifles creativity in new themes and formats. Marvel's obviously a superhero comic book company, and has to be identified as that --but given this "Toy Maker" system, what chance does a one-shot detective story have to see print? What they're doing is imposing forms of the past, without even opening the door to new themes & formats.

To see what I mean by imposition, think of this: they have the 40 cent format now. That may be a higher cover price, but basically that's the same format as when comics began in the thirties. They were meant to self-destruct: they were meant to be throw-away items. No one thought they would be read for more than ten minutes... certainly not collected or saved as they are now.

Today the companies know that comics are saved, but they still print them on lousy paper -- and you know they're going to get brittle after awhile. They should be treating the fans better, by going to better paper with better inks -- giving better formats. And, if the cover price goes up, I think the fan who buys the comics would appreciate it.

HLD: Kurt Schaffenberger, when he was talking about an hour ago--you know that his career spans a great many years--spoke of the dips in the business. One that was specifically mentioned was in the fifties --not Dr Wertham's, but caused by the onset of television, which tended to kill off the books.

RM: I don't believe it!

HLD: Oh, yes--he definitely say the dip. It seems to me that it was apparently a case of the fantasy need of the child, which was formerly filled by the 4-colour medium, being filled by the television. So they didn't need the comic book.

RM: I don't think that's a factor at all because the last renaissance -- there is supposed to be one every generation, and we're overdue for one now -- a period of important creative activity and good sales was in the early sixties, when television had been established for over ten years.

HLD: The thing which I see that counters what you say is that the resurgence of comics in the early sixties, I believe, came in large measure because the comic book people discovered a disaffected audience. These were young people who had watched TV for a certain number of years of their life, and gotten bloody sick of it. That was the advanced high school to early college age people. It seems to me that the early sixties comics appealed to them.

RM: That's a factor to be sure, but if you look at the company's own data--oh sure, Stan will say at conventions that they were all college kids reading Marvel--the average age (not the median age) was 8 to 12 or something like that. I don't think (the college age reading) is the full case. It's a factor, but to lean too heavily on that ignores the fact that comics today are just lousy. By and large they're just bad. That's why they're not being read--or not being bought.

HLD: Yes, but that's not why they're not being distributed...

RM: Yes, I think ultimately it is. I think that if sales were as brisk as they were a generation ago, the retailers would be putting them out. Even if the percentage wouldn't be great, the volume would be. But I think most of the kids outside of the cult are just tired of the same old fights, the lack of innovation. You know, it wasn't too long ago that we had a dozen comic book titles selling more than a million copies a month; now the biggest seller is Spider-Man, selling a quarter of that.

(At this point Stu Reisbord joined in with points from the Comics Journal interview with Rick Marschall, Jim Shooter's refutation, etc. A lot of ground was covered: you're urged to pick up TCJ #52 and learn about it.)

RM: The factors also apply to newspaper story strips. As you know I was at three syndicates. One of the interesting things with newspaper comics now is that the story strips are doing so poorly. There are many excuses in the industry for that --TV can give a half-hour of excitement, so why wait 13 weeks for a newspaper comic story? All kinds of reasons, but it's the same thing operating there: the strips are a lot poorer than they used to be. Caniff is tepid; there's no more excitement. Prince Valiant isn't what it used to be. And that's the main reason that the story strips are dying.

HLD: So what you're saying is that you're seeing a malaise in creativity. Or is it something stifling in the attitudes of the editors and publishers?

RM: Well, it's both...it's both. The attitudes of editors should carry through to the creators. There's very little creativity, but the editors aren't responding to the lack. And the managers... Forget about them responding to a lack of creativity, they could care less if the stuff is fresh and new or dull and dead. As long as they get the contracts to get Spidey on the thermos bottle, they don't care--they don't care! The attitude is just to keep the books available, to keep the merchandising alive.

(The discussion rambled at this point. Howard spoke of various artists & writers who were dissatisfied, and the specific points of dissatisfaction each expressed. The point was made that Richard Marschall is not alone in his feelings. Whether comics would have a greater impact on culture by reaching a quality-conscious small audience or by reaching the widest possible number with a lesser quality product became a point of discussion. Then the subject turned to the rôle of Marvel's editorial boss, and the desirability of the job.)

RM: Oh, I don't know how many people want the Editor-in-Chief job at Marvel; they realize it is dehumanizing...but it is a position of power right now. There are two reasons for that. One is that the investing of power into the job finally happened under Shooter, because he is ambitious & power-hungry. And that's not necessarily said in a perjorative way. The other reason is that Stan's new system is such that he has abrogated all of his responsibility. He spends most of his time out on the West Coast now -- and I think he's very grateful that there's someone who can take command and be ruthless and make decisions, so that Stan doesn't have to dirty his hands at all. He may regret seeing me or Marv go. He may regret seeing articles on internal discontent...but, as long as the books are coming out and Stan doesn't have to worry with the nuts and bolts, I think he's very grateful. He's not a publisher. He has the title, but it's the old Peter Principle. Even what he's supposed to be doing--administering the office, coming up with new ideas, etc --he's relinquished that. He's not keeping close watch on the characters. That's one of Marvel's big problems.

HLD: To sum up: Your two years at Marvel, were they happy years or sad years?

RM: To tell the truth, I had a ball... I had a great time. The people were nice; it was a really creative attitude.

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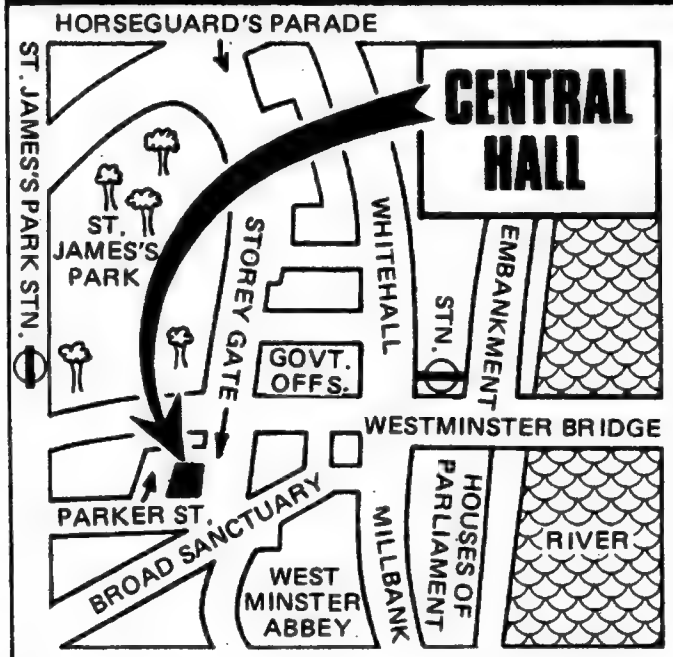

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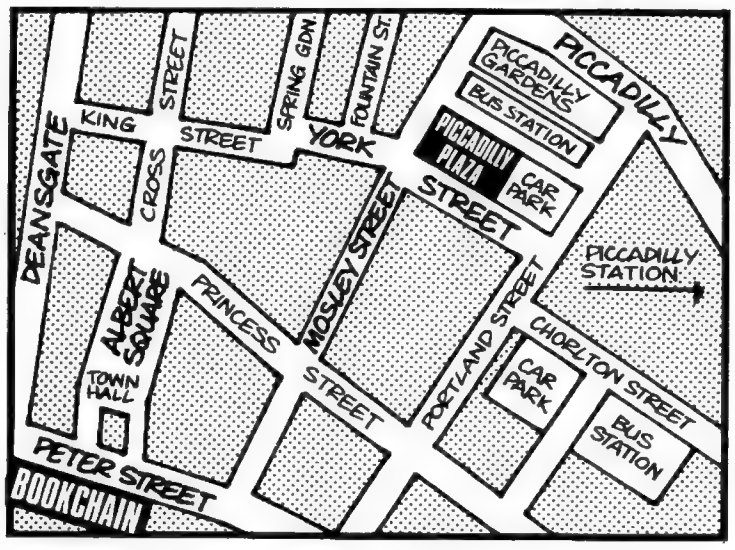

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X-MEN #134 (June)
"Too Late, The Heroes"
by Claremont, Byrne & Austin

There always comes a time in any successful enterprise when its supporters turn away from it, and find hitherto-unseen faults. This applies especially to successful comics, and recently to X-MEN. It has become fashionable to say that X-MEN "is not what it was", that the scripting and plotting are going downhill (witness the microscopic scrutiny lavished on alleged plot discrepancies by 'mandarin' Glancy et al), that the art is more rushed nowadays, and so it goes on. Is this phenomenon a reflection of the actual state of the book, or is it just a symptom of familiarity with the long-running cast of characters and staff?

Personally, after reading this issue, the finale of the Hellfire Club saga, I believe that X-MEN is as good, if not better, now as it was in the early, fan-rave days (i.e. pre-#107). That is not to say that it is marvelous now, merely that the early Claremont/Cockrum issues are not superior significantly to the present issues.

Of course that still leaves us with the best, and most consistent, Marvel 40 cent book on the stands at present. A book basing its success on the fan-prestige of its heroes and villains, on the competence of its scripter and on the unique style of its artists. On the premise that there are only one or two "top-quality" books on sale at any one time, X-MEN, under its present staff, is a worthy successor to the CAPTAIN AMERICA-TOMB OF DRACULA-MICRONAUTS line. -Barry K. Winetrobe

ELFQUEST #6
"The Quest Begins"
by Wendy & Richard Pini ($1.25)

I suppose it's hard for "outsiders" to take comics seriously as an adult medium when confronted with "cute elf comic-books" like this, which is a shame because if they ever took the time to read it, they'd probably end up as highly entertained as I was. This book <u>warms</u> me, makes me peaceful and even contented. Its delightful art and satisfying stories do something which no mainstream comics can manage. It's the kind of book in which you <u>don't</u> study the techniques used, the depths of the characters, etc--it defies the harsh in-depth view of a critic, because it's there to express love, and happiness, and to hell with the "obligatory fight scenes". Complete escapism, and worth watching out for. -Mike Taylor

WARLORD #33 (May)
"Birds of Prey" by Grell & Colletta

And I had such high hopes for Mike Grell when he began drawing the Legion some years ago. Surely he can do better than this, a poor man's Conan. Of course, he isn't helped by Vince Colletta, quite possibly the world's dullest inker, with the dubious ability to take the energy out of the most vibrant pencil artwork--I still haven't forgiven him for murdering Gil Kane's pencils on Green Lantern #70.

Behind a cover showing Warlord posing as Clint Eastwood in "Dirty Harry" and "Magnum Force" we have a plot, for want of a better word, which consists of Travis Morgan losing his cat/girl to a band of Hawkmen, meeting some Munchkin refugees from the Wizard of Oz, destroying the Hawkmen by arson about at their nest, and recovering the cat/woman. Readable, but as exciting as a visit to the laundrette.

Grell inking himself and a new writer would be an improvement, but since the lettercol readers seem to enjoy the comic as it is, plus it is a monthly, perhaps it's true that there is no arguing with success. Just the same, I can't help thinking it could be so much better if they tried a bit harder. -Nige Edwards

EPIC ILLUSTRATED #1 (Spring)

As a certain R. Fiore said in The Comics Journal #52, "Well, the Distinguished Thing is finally upon us". He/she/it was referring to the spectrum colour "Weird-world" but, after even greater & lengthier pre-publicity, 12 weird worlds have now suddenly fallen upon us (13 if you count the cover; 14 if you include Stan Lee's "Sermon on the Plateau").

Comparisons with "Warriors of the Shadow Realm" are quite inevitable, due to Marvel's current fixation with fairies and things of that sort. Without wishing to appear unkind, it probably says a lot about the mentalities of the people who produce this sort of strips that they find pixies & pointed ears so appealing.

The character who started Marvel's march into metaphysics, the Silver Surfer, opens proceedings with what I can only assume is intended as an 8-page parody of the more pretentious sort of sixties Marvel strip. Stan does a competent pastiche of a 15-years younger version of himself, while John Buscema is less subtle, content to simply swipe from himself. Fortunately, Nebres and Vietch are on hand to make the thing look more complex and interesting than it really is.

If the above paragraph reads as a long-winded attempt to suggest that the Surfer story was somewhat superficial, it does seem to me that any strip under 5 pages long in this format (no continuing characters) is likely, without sufficient inspiration, to degenerate into a mere excuse for a sequence of pretty pictures. This is <u>more</u> than likely considering the number of artist/writers. While there is no doubt a place or two on this planet for pretty pictures, they do not, of necessity, constitute good comics.

An even more obvious point is that text stories (accompanied by yet more pretty pictures) don't make any sort of comics at all, and I would like to see them removed. The first text story, incidentally, is dreadfully written and totally pointless, while the second (by George Bush from an original idea by Ronald Reagan) is actually quite cute and, as a mere one page, maybe deserved a place here as a filler.

Now the good points:

First, the Frazetta cover:- very restrained, determined and we-mean-business, not the blurb-covered, gaudy and trying-desperately-to-be-eye-catching job I was expecting. A very worthy entrance scene.

Secondly, the Wendy Pini job. Although this starts off as a garden-variety elves and pixies gig, it hits us with a beautifully jarring final chord which renders all the previous coyness (particularly the perplexing panel 4, page 32) suddenly acceptable. Pini, despite her excellent sense of design and colour, is probably a good example of someone who would never have made it into mainstream Marvel, due to her seemingly naive and simplistic drawing style. In some ways, she has a lot in common with Marie Severin.

Thirdly, Jim Starlin; an artist/writer for several years in a class of his own, and someone who genuinely belongs in a book called "Epic Illustrated". I'm looking forward to the next episode of his continuing work printed in colour, as these episodes appear to have been rendered in colour but printed in black & white.

Fourthly, another artist who would never have been given a mainstream strip -- Ray Rue. Strangely enough, the comments made about Pini are largely applicable to Rue also, so I will close by noting a few further plus factors.

The fuss made about Marschall's dismissal from this book was largely overblown--Goodwin is a far more suitable choice for editorial director, and possibly the person I respect most in mainstream American comics. I could almost believe he wrote the letter from Neal Adams himself, as it reads as if it were written as a satire of what everyone would <u>expect</u> Adams to say. From an editorial standpoint, I would like to see more space given to contributors with truly original visions -- not recycled versions of Berni Wrightson, Gil Kane and M.C. Escher, as in this issue (the last two both in the same strip).

Some have complained about this book being a quarterly -- a typical cavil from the average comicbook junkie. This is the last publication I would want to see damaged or diminished by oppressive schedules. If the overall editorial and production standards apparent in this first issue are maintained, though, it hopefully never will be. -Chris Ash

THOR #296 (June)
"From Valhalla--A Valkyrie" by Roy Thomas, Keith Pollard & Chic Stone

I'm trying to work out if the story this issue is a flashback, a flashback within a flashback, or merely stapled together wrongly. Clearly, once this epic, or part of the overall super-epic, ends (in issue 300?) I shall have to re-read the previous Thomas issues at one sitting. Mind you, it's all very enjoyable, far better than Ray's earlier stint on the book, and adequately drawn as well. Roy seems to be determined to solve every discrepancy in the Norse Legends à la Marvel, currently using the "Ring" cycle of Wagner operas as his plot vehicle (for more info on Wagner in comics, see current and future issues of VERTIGO--cough!). Having only a slight knowledge of the Wagner stories (via a Wagnerite co-editor!), I can't say how faithful is Roy's adaptation. Still, it seems to provide fairly plausible explanations for the various "inconsistencies" of the previous 200-odd Thor issues, and I gather the story will soon be returning to the Celestials. You do remember that plot from a year or so ago ...don't you? -Barry K. Winetrobe

NATIONAL LAMPOON (February)
"Tenth Anniversary Issue"

Buy it. -Chris Ash

SUPERMAN #347 (May)
"The Sleeper Out of Time" by Gerry Conway & J.L. Garcia Lopez

How fitting that quite the best of the latest crop of DC comics should be their top seller! Curt Swan's art is excellent always, but Lopez has managed something more here. There's a touch of Neal Adams in his work, melded with a fluid looseness I find intriguing, and humour, plus as an added bonus Superman looking like the irresistable Christopher Reeve.

Yes, beautiful art; and Gerry Conway, I must report, has done his best script since his Justice Society work. Some may grumble that Lois and Supes dancing in the sky is a fairly straight appropriation of a sequence from The Movie, but to me it was a compliment, and a complement!

Though it's Superman rather than Clark who's dating Lois, Gerry has managed to fit my favourite mild-mannered reporter into the story, along with the rest of the Galaxy Communications team...and I always enjoy their company. The plot's better than average too -- but, hell, we get one of those every month! -C.N. Padgett

MICRONAUTS #18 (June)
"Child Eyes" by Bill Mantlo, Howard Chaykin & Al Milgrom

Y'know it's funny. Fans often complain about the ever-decreasing page count in comics these days, and yet a comic like this one can make you realise how much of a blessing that can be!

I won't bother to tell you that the art by Chaykin and Milgrom is some of the most banal ever -- if you've seen any of the other recent issues, then you'll already have guessed that. So let's talk about the story, shall we?

Mantlo has seen fit to dump the unkillable Micronauts back on Earth where, no doubt, they will experience a number of "Land of the Giants" (remember that old series?) type stories before they return to the Microverse. This issue's tale is a rather trivial and childish piece, involving a doll's house with -- gasp!--living dolls! How much excitement can one stand?

Incidentally, do you realise that no less than four Micronauts have been killed so far, the first three of which miraculously were brought back to life. And the fourth shall no doubt reappear in an issue or two. After a while, credibility wanes.
-Mike Taylor

2000 A.D. progs 152-154

The newest boom wave in 2000 A.D. is now three weeks on; and it looks promising. Robo-Hunter is the best on offer, T.B. Grover always writes a competent script and this is no exception. The storyline concerns Sam Slade being hired by a civic bigwig who wakes up one morning to discover that he is a robot, not a human as he had thought. The phrase "Day of the Droids" crops up, and Slade is enmeshed in a deadly robotic plot to take over the world. Sam has a new "assistant" called Hoagy, a robot who desperately wishes to learn how to become a robo-hunter. All gripping stuff! Ian Gibson's artwork is the usual fantastic work, although the current printing really botches it up, unfortunately. If all goes as planned, "Day of the Droids" will run for twenty-two episodes.

To release John Wagner from some deadline hassles, Pat Mills wrote the 3-part "Blood of Satannus" tale; however, it's not up to Pat's usual standards, reminding me too much of the various Lizard rehashes in the pages of SPIDER-MAN. And in lots of panels "Rex" looks too much like a certain well-known "Alien", especially in the 2nd instalment; make of it what you will.

WE WANTED TO MAKE THIS ADVERT SOMETHING SPECIAL, WITH A BORDER OF FANTASY ART IN LAVISH COLOURS, AND BOLD TYPESET LETTERING TELLING YOU WHAT WE ARE SELLING. WELL, AS YOU CAN SEE, WHAT WE ENDED UP WITH WAS A DO-IT-YOURSELF AD, WITH ME JUST TELLING YOU THAT WE STOCK COMICS, SUPERHERO BOOKS, POCKET BOOKS, FILM MAGAZINES, ART BOOKS, COMIC MAGAZINES, U.K. WEEKLIES, PORTFOLIOS, U.K. MONTHLIES, TREASURIES, POSTERS, AND S.F. BOOKS. WHY NOT SEND A LARGE STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE TO

DEREK AND SANDIE

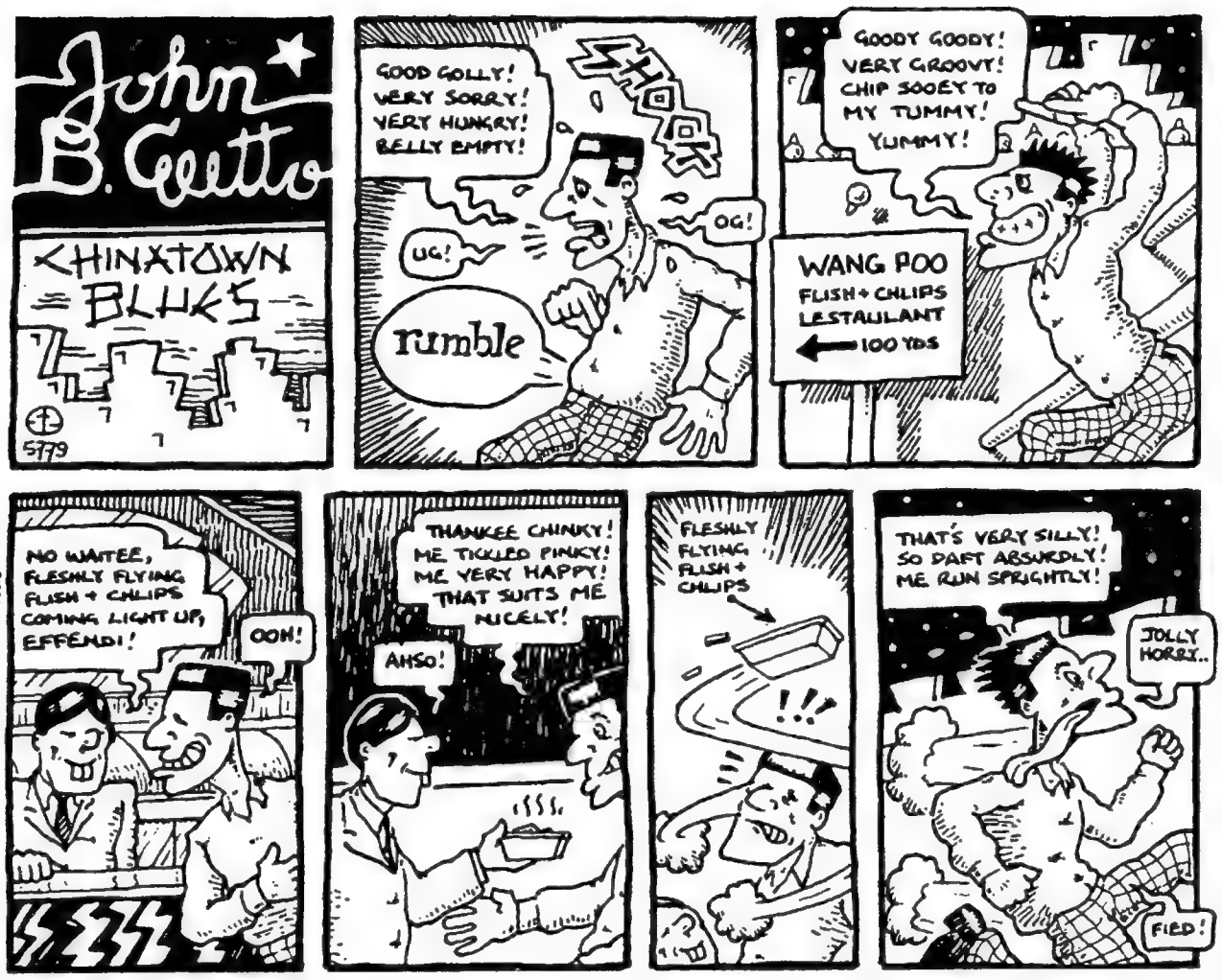
PS: FEEL FREE TO FILL IN THE REST OF THIS PAGE WITH YOUR OWN ARTWORK, BUT SEND FOR OUR LISTS FIRST.

The second new strip is "Fiends of the Eastern Front", which is, surprisingly (to me, anyway), very good. It involves a group of Romanian vampires in World War II, by Finlay-Day. The artist, Ezquerra (who seems to be doing a lot recently), has turned in some of his best artwork; it has intriguing subplots, and a special surprise ending coming up, to boot.

BlackHawk continues at a steady pace, with those two fantastic characters, Ursa and Zog, getting some of the best lines in comics history. And as the nubian warrior searches for his elusive soul, it promises to get better!

And finally, the VC's: nothing exceptional, just good, entertaining reading. A factor adding to the enjoyment is the superb artwork of Gary Leach. It might be of interest to note that most of the scripts are rewritten by editor Steve McManus. It's amazing what one learns!

Two extras are the 4-part "The Hall of Heroes" poster, principally by Ron Smith, which looks nice, and the "Top Ten Sci-Fi Movies" series, which has some interesting choices -- though it's a pity that the photographs aren't up to standard. On the whole, the next twelve issues look good--very good! -Pat Thomas



IRON MAN #134 (May)
"The Challenge" by David Michelinie, Jerry Bingham & Bob Layton

Well, not a lot happens this month--and that's the way I like it! For those who go for all-out action, Tony Stark checks out his metal suit in his own "danger room" for the first 5 pages; but after that he puts his armour away and strolls off to meet Bethany Cabe, who's quite the best representative of that endangered species, the hero's girlfriend, since the departure of Silver St. Cloud from the life of a certain Caped Crusader. It's always nice to see a hero relax for a few pages, and Tony has enough magnetism these days to carry it off; thanks to new boy Jerry Bingham, inked as ever by co-plotter Bob Layton, he meets some good-looking women, too!

Of course, at the end "an old foe" is looking for the Armoured Avenger, so the time for relaxation is drawing to a close --that's life, Marvel style! -C.N. Padgett

SPEED: The First Six Issues

IPC's new variety-adventure comic for boys debuted on Saturday February 16th; since it included a free plastic "speed plane", the huge piles sold out quickly, whether or not they were delivered (as at the press launch) by Stirling Moss. There has been room for a good old-fashioned "anthology" comic for some time, as Dez Skinn was saying in Bem-27; IPC were of the same opinion, obviously.

And yet -- have IPC got the right mix? Group editor Barrie Tomlinson and SPEED editor David Hunt (from BATTLE-ACTION) have decided a theme is needed, hence the title; and although in theory this comic is aiming at the same 8-15 age group as B-A and 2000 A.D., it seems to concentrate on the lower half of the range. The format is very similar to the sports-orientated TIGER, with eight strips, none over three pages long, plus articles, features and photos, all tied in with a high velocity.

Yes, speed is the word: "Baker's Half-Dozen", drawn by expert war artist Mike Western, has Sarge Baker and his soldiers zooming about North Africa, circa 1942, on motorbikes; 'Flash' Jordan, "Fastest Footballer On Earth", runs rings around other players, if the sun's shining; and "Speedboy" is a schoolboy obsessed with breaking his own record for getting to school. "Topps on Two Wheels" is a young Eddie Kidd-type stunt rider, "Quick on the Draw" features a veteran gunfighter and his young protegé (Johnny Storm, no less --out for vengeance against the gang that killed his parents), and "Death Wish" has a "king of speed...a superstar of British sport" who after a bad accident is badly disfigured, and, donning a leather mask, does risky stunts since he has nothing to lose. "The £1,000,000 Challenge" is a reader participation strip -- you suggest speed thrills, they make an adventure out of it, and if the presenter gets off on it, you win a £5 postal order.

Lastly, "Journey To The Stars" is an SF strip, with 2 colour pages per week, drawn by Ron Turner. It's the sort of story some humour comics carry as a token adventure strip, with a whole family lost in space --hardly a new idea, on TV or in comics.

So, have IPC got another winner on their hands, or will we see "TIGER AND SPEED" by August? I'd like to see it succeed, so my fingers are crossed! -Ruan Lanihorne

CEREBUS #14 (March)
"The Walls of Palnu" by Dave Sim

Readers may recall that, when I reviewed number 11 back in Bem-26, I wasn't exactly over-enthusiastic; but this issue I kinda like. (Readers step back in amazement!)

No, Cerebus the Aardvark still doesn't appeal to me as a character, although the story this time is more in sympathy with my cynical outlook on life, with its twisted views on bureaucracy. It's the persona of Lord Julius, ruler elite of the city, who wisecracks "I paid good money to become what I am today", smokes large cigars, has bushy eyebrows and a big moustache... Sounds vaguely familiar? Yes, the maestro himself, Groucho Marx.

Being an ardent Marx Brothers fan, I can't help liking this plot, which seems a cross between Conan versus the rebels and the film "Duck Soup". Recommended for all Marxists. -Nige Edwards

HEAVY METAL #37 (April)

The third anniversary issue; the fourth issue featuring Ted White's editorial presence, including the "flix", "muzick", and "sf" columns along with Norman Spinrad on Star Trek & Black Hole and Maurice Horn on Italian artist Guido Crepax, not to mention sensible editorials --but more importantly, this issue sees the conclusion of the Moebius "Airtight Garage" serial, and also "Beast of Wolfton" by Corben--plus the start of "Champakou".

Bilal and Caza both contribute 4-page colour vignettes; Lupoff & Stiles move 6 pages further into their brand of weirdness; and Matt Howarth kills off a Batman clone. However, behind the rocky canine cover pinched off some Lovecraft-mythos paperback (not a patch on March's great John Bolton cover), the lushly painted, full-colour debut of "Champakou" (from Metal Hurlant) by Jeronaton is the main reason to buy this magazine. It's the dark ages in Europe, but in South America the people of Sayatal are flourishing. 32 superb pages introduce us to the young hero and heroine and their life; and if you think "Aztec Adventures" isn't the normal HM fare, on page 31 an alien spaceship drifts slowly down! Very nice work... -Ruan Lanihorne

NIGHT MUSIC #1 (£4.95)
An Eclipse Enterprises book, by P. Craig Russell

Since he left Marvel, after a rather sketchy issue (the last, actually) of AMAZING ADVENTURES featuring Killraven, I have not been all that keen on Russell's new artistic style; it appeared to have become too lightweight, 2-D, and arty-farty, sort of an overboard version of early Barry Smith Conans. Not only this, but he didn't seem to have an original thought in his head, turning to operas for his inspiration.

It may well have been that it was this fairly abrupt change of style that put me off Craig's work, although I did enjoy his art on the Dr Strange annual.

However, with the first story in this book, Russell has written a fairly original story and has provided an interesting visual interpretation of it. It is a story that would probably become fact, if a lot of us fans became astronauts. Although we would like to think otherwise, having read so many science fiction stories, comics, etc, I bet that we'd all be know-alls, imagining ourselves as Super-Astronaut, whereas, like the protagonist in "Breakdown On The Starship Remembrance", quite a few of us would possibly crack up under the strain. Running a starship isn't always left to the Wookiee sidekick, you know, and I doubt if life would be as exciting as we would like to think.

As for the second piece, it is a "work in progress", i.e. it is not a completed story -- maybe that's why it managed to totally baffle me.

Artwise, Russell has shown a better understanding of anatomy in the first piece. One scene is particularly good--panel 7 on page 12, which shows the shuttlecraft blasting away from the mother ship, drawn in such a way that the coils of metal cable and other machinery look rather like plants reaching for the sun.

Overall, I feel that this is a fine book, showing some of the best of Craig Russell's more up-to-date work, and is worth the rather steep price of £4.95.

-Ken Moore

Before *Amazine* . . . before *Hola!* . . . there was . . .

PRINCESSIONS

The *Wonder Woman* newszine!

Princessions is back and ready to publish in full swing again! For those who missed us during our first two years, *Princessions* was the first fanzine to honor superheroine number one, and we're looking better than ever! We have better artwork, photos, features and reprographics to make us one of the best fanzines out today. We have all the latest in Wonder Woman happenings *and* Lynda Carter *and* news on other superheroes *and* a look at other comic, TV and cinema accomplishments! After a rough year of finances, *Princessions* is coming back, and what a comeback!

" . . . interesting, well-rounded with commentary on females in comics *and* the media, and loaded with well-printed photographs." — Carol Strickland, *Hola!*

" . . . superb article on *The Avengers* (TV's *Avengers,* not Marvel's). The artwork is good and the photographs are magnificent, I only wish it were bigger." — Bobby Sommerkamp, *Fanzine Connection*

Contributors welcome. No queries please. Material will be returned only if accompanied by a sufficiently stamped-self-addressed envelope. Dealer's prices are available. Sample issues are 50¢ each.

35¢ each in person
50¢ thru the mail
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In the United Kingdom:
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And in *Princessions* #10:

What Lynda Carter's doing now that "Wonder Woman" is over.

Star Trek-The Motion Picture

Kirk Alyn on Superman, Wonder Woman, and his career

plus the usual photos, art, letters & more. Also available are *Princessions* #1-9.

LORD OF THE RINGS

I'd better begin by admitting that I have never actually read Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings". I did once buy a large paperback edition--which I later sold to Mike Cruden, as I recall -- but I wasn't able/willing to make the effort necessary to wade through it. The couple of hundred or so pages I did manage were all couched in what my dear old ma calls "prithee talk" (she can't abide costume movies etc in which all the characters use "prithee talk"), and I found them quite stodgy. Therefore I approached Ralph Bakshi's animated adaptation with no preconceptions. What follows is an outsider's view.

The very first scenes of Bakshi's film are tinted blood-red. The action they contain, conveyed in a series of silhouettes, like an Oriental shadow play, recounts a brief history of The Ring. I may be a bit dim, but I'm bound to admit that I found this resumé a little hard to understand. In fact, I could hardly follow the entire film plot-wise, though this did not impair my enjoyment of it especially. Subsequently the film's main characters are introduced--Bilbo and Frodo, Sam and Gandalf the Grey (grey is the traditional colour of magicians) et al. The animation in these early scenes is very accomplished. The individual figures are well-rounded, and their movements are not obviously based on film of the human form. Later scenes utilize some variation of the rotoscope process more obviously, primarily to depict the powers of evil.

The real stars of the early part of the film are the stare-eyed and skeletal Dark Riders, whose appearances are genuinely chilly. Take their night-time attack on Frodo, Aragorn and party, for example: The Riders, as they drift slowly out of the darkness with slow, sub-aqueous dream-movements, convey a memorable frisson of unease. Even more evocative is their final appearance, as they pursue Frodo towards the Ford of Rivendell. At this juncture, they resemble creatures from the apocalypse--especially in one brief shot of four of them galloping directly towards the viewer, their eyes, and the eyes and the mouths of their mounts, glowing like balefire. A flash of one of their drowning horses as it drifts down to die oddly recalls Jim Morrison's poem "Horse Latitudes". (By the way, the image of horses swimming, drowning or rising out of water exerts a strange fascination, for some reason. Keep a look out for it. A goodly proportion of the ghastly reproduction oil paintings on sale in Boots' feature variations on this theme.)

The Orcs, who crop up in later sequences, do not come over anywhere near as forcefully as do the Dark Riders. This is mainly because they appear in such large numbers. Their menace is therefore much more impersonal and, somehow, much less immediate. The Dark Riders seem like genuinely supernatural creatures of evil; the Orcs are little more than a bunch of ugly-looking thugs. Nevertheless, the battle scenes near the end of the film have a kind of savage epic quality about them. They rely heavily on footage of live actors, and thus some purists may contend that they aren't "real" animation at all. That is, it may be argued that whereas the Disney animators create a synthesis of reality out of their heads, Bakshi and his crew merely enhance live-action footage via a process akin to tracing. This is a valid comment up to a point--but it does not really diminish Bakshi's overall achievement at all. Ultimately, the film still stands as a stunning visual experience, and that's what counts.

The chief failing of "LotR" is that it ends too abruptly. The battle at Helm's Deep, though a real treat for the eyes, is wound up with an almost indecent haste. The wise and kindly Gandalf hacks a couple of Orcs to death (the fountains of blood that spurt from them recall the gory excesses of Bakshi's "Fritz the Cat" and "Heavy Traffic"); a brown-voiced narrator makes a few comments on the overall action --and that's it! Those unfamiliar with Tolkien's original work are left up in the air, with no inkling of what's going to become of the various factions involved, or how the action will be resolved.

It has also been suggested by some die-hard Tolkien addicts that the character adaptations aren't faithful enough -- his Aragorn isn't sufficiently Aragorn-like; his Gollum isn't Gollumish enough, and so on. This charge is briefly touched upon in the mag FANTASY MEDIA, but it doesn't hold much water because it depends purely on subjective criteria. By which I mean that each individual familiar with the book is bound to have a personal idea of what its characters ought to look like, based on his on her own powers of interpretation.

Besides which, it isn't fair to keep comparing Bakshi's "LotR" with Tolkien's. For better or worse, it deserves to be judged independently, as an entity in its own right. I believe it confirms Bakshi as a film-maker of skill and good taste--insofar as anyone working in the mass media can be said to possess "good taste".

Other points worthy of attention: Treebeard looks great, just like something out of a Harvey hiddies' Komik, and the scenes featuring the winged entity with which Gandalf does battle are effectively weird. The film also contains some lovely background paintings, even if the moving figures don't always integrate into them as well as they might; and it's to Ralph Bakshi's credit that by and large all the characters speak in clear British accents rather than in ghastly mid-Atlantic tones, as may have been expected.

Finally, the strangely-coloured live-action/animation composite sequences make "LotR" an absolute must for all lovers of fantasy. They convey a uniquely dreamlike feeling of dislocation. I have never seen Bakshi's "Wizards", but I understand it featured a variation on this technique. I have, however, seen "Fritz the Cat" (disowned by Crumb at the time of its release, but still OK) and "Heavy Traffic", and I still regard both as occasionally quite involved and involving evocations of urban desolation. With "LotR", Bakshi has in effect come of age. I believe that no other film-maker could have made such a good job of adapting it. He is the only one with the necessary resources and, yes, the necessary integrity. I only hope that he will be able to finish the entire project off properly at some time in the future.

-Pete Scott

THE HULK! ≠20 (April)
"Power Unchained" by Doug Moench, Ron Wilson & Alfredo Alcala, plus Moon Knight in "A Long Way to Dawn" by Doug Moench & Bill Sienkiewicz

The Hulk follows in Jane Fonda's footsteps, and becomes involved in a nuclear accident likely to make Three Mile Island look like Guy Fawkes Night. It's quite well-written, giving Moench the chance to air his views on nuclear power. The art is well-inked by Alcala in his inimitable style, and of course the "Super-Marvel Colour!" adds that nice touch.

The Moon Knight story is disappointing in that it's only 7 pages long. For what there is of it, the story (an end to the "Hatchet Man" plot) meanders pleasantly, if you try to forget that a life hangs in the balance! -John M. Parker

VAMPIRELLA ≠86 (April)
"Revenge of the Renegade Wizard" by Will Richardson & Gonzalo Mayo; "Snarking Down" by Bruce Jones & Auraleon; "Brain Food" by Michael Fleisher & Jun Lofomia; and "The Pygmalion Effect" by Nicola Cuti, Val Mayerik & Jeff Easley.

The first strip is a readable tale, Will Richardson's script being functional with the characters little more than one-dimensional cardboard cutouts. Vampirella has potential, but until the writers instil some character depth into the strip that potential will remain unfulfilled. Gonzalo Mayo's art is suitably decorative with Vampirella and Pantha assuming the obligatory poses as they are captured, recaptured and have a less than nice time.

"Snarking Down" reminds me a bit of a tale I read a while back in Heavy Metal, about a humanoid-type fleshy thing getting sexual fulfilment with the help of a friendly alien. Next: "Sheep Farming In Lower Bilge".

"Brain Food" is terrible, verging on the sick. I've often seen Fleisher referred to as the most macabre bastard in comic book history, and this is the sort of tale that helps him maintain that reputation. This one is about a tribe that eats live monkey's brains. After you wipe clean the pages after having thrown up over them, you find the story to be incoherent/plotless/moronic. Witch doctors, mumbo jumbo, extra heads...

"The Pygmalion Effect", on the other hand, is excellent, if a wee bit slushy and sentimental. It's about a little girl who is lonely and longs for some friends so, one day, she makes her cuddly toys come to life. Cuti handles the story very well, and captures the thoughts of the little girl in such a way as to make one believe in the character. A charming tale.

The issue concludes with a back-page editorial by publisher James Warren, entitled "Never Again", in which Warren expresses his opinion of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iran 'crisis':

"...we do know how we feel about anyone, or any mob, or any country's lunatic leader threatening American lives or destroying American flags.

"We don't like it--and we won't tolerate it. We won't be pushed around. We won't be blackmailed by Iranian oil. We won't be threatened.

"Our American countrymen alive, or Khomeini and his henchmen dead."

Warren does not offer a solution.

"Our American countrymen alive, or Khomeini and his henchmen dead."

-Stephen McGonagle

FANTASTIC FOUR ≠218 (May)
"When a Spider-Man Comes Calling" by Bill Mantlo, John Byrne & Joe Sinnott

Well, if I hadn't been told it was drawn by John Byrne I'd have sworn this was Sal Buscema or his brother; I guess this is intentional, to keep the "house" style of this title.

Bill regurgitates several old ideas such as the Frightful Four invading the Baxter Building, Trapster disguised as Spidey, and the Sandman-captured-inside-a-vacuum number, amongst the tired clichés. To be fair, these may only be old hat to long-time readers like me, and they do gell together to form a competent if unoriginal story.

Lack of subplots tempts me to think this is just a fill-in, allowing the new writer & artist from the next issue time to get things together. Still, when a comic declares itself as "the world's greatest comic magazine", I do expect something better. Maybe that's why it's declared in such small letters... -Nige Edwards

CH 4

STAMPEDE!

WRITTEN BY: Martin Lock

OUR SHIP WAS IN DANGER, UP ON THE PLANET'S SURFACE -- SO CAPTAIN RUSSELL WAS WASTING NO TIME RETURNING TO IT

YOU'RE SURE WE CAN NEGOTIATE THE TUNNEL SAFELY, MR. BROWN?

CERTAINLY=gulp= PILOT. IT CLOSES TO KEEP ANIMALS OUT; NOT MEN IN!

SO WE GOT SAFELY OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE MOUNTAIN -- AND INTO THE FIRING AREA

ON BOARD MEN, QUICKLY! FRANK, HAVE WE ENOUGH POWER TO FLY BACK TO THE CONQUEROR?

NEGATIVE, CAPTAIN. WE'LL HAVE TO USE THE WHEELS---

R.D.N 79

THE BEASTS ARE GOING MAD, SIR!

THEY'LL GET WORSE, COTTS, AS SUNDOWN APPROACHES. CHIEF, PASS OVER THE LINKER -- I MUST SPEAK TO THE CONQUEROR!

1

CAPTAIN TO CONQUEROR. PRIME ALERT--PREPARE FOR LIFT-OFF WITH ALL SPEED. BEGIN WARM-UP SEQUENCE RIGHT AWAY!

HOW LONG TO SUNSET, LIEUTENANT FL'FF?

THE SUN'S DISC WILL TOUCH THE HORIZON IN SEVENTY MINUTES, CAPTAIN. FULL DARKNESS IS DUE HERE IN THREE HOURS!

Lt FL'FF

AND IT WILL TAKE NINETY MINUTES TO GET MY SHIP OFF THIS PLANET, FL'FF.

IT'S GOING TO BE A DAMNED CLOSE-RUN THING!

WE DIDN'T SEE ANY ANIMALS ON THE OUTWARD JOURNEY--AND NOW THIS!

AND AS THE LINE OF NIGHT GETS CLOSER, THEY'LL GET WORSE, FL'FF.

ARE YOU STUCK, LIEUTENANT LUKE?

NO SIR, WE CAN REVERSE CLEAR. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

BACK TO THE CONQUEROR RIGHT AWAY, OR WE LEAVE WITHOUT YOU!

RUSSELL

YES... SIR...

2

WE MUST BE READY FOR LIFT-OFF WITHIN 40 MINUTES, PALMER!

AH! THAT SOUNDS LIKE COMMODORE JENKINS SHOUTING AT ENGINEER PALMER WHO HEADS THE PROPULSION SECTION

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, COMMODORE! A FULL HOUR'S THE VERY MINIMUM, THE SYSTEM *CANNOT* BE STRAINED BEFORE IT'S READY!

THE SCOUTS REPORT LARGER BEASTS ON THEIR WAY, PALMER! THE FENCE IS DISINTEGRATING, OUR LANDING SUPPORTS AREN'T INVULNERABLE--

COMMODORE, THE CAPTAIN'S BACK! EVERYONE'S ACCOUNTED FOR NOW!

GET THE CENTRAL RAMP DOWN, SO THEY CAN DRIVE STRAIGHT IN!

FL'FF, YOU REPORT TO THE BRIDGE--THE REST OF YOU, BACK OUTSIDE WITH ME!

WE'VE GOT SOME TIDYING UP TO DO!

CAPTAIN, THE SHIP WILL LIFT IN 40 MINUTES--WHY DON'T WE JUST CLOSE UP TIGHT, AND SIT IT OUT?

IF THE LANDING STRUTS ARE DAMAGED WE'RE STUCK HERE, FRANK! I KNOW YOU'RE NO MARKSMAN, BUT JUST STAY CLOSE, EH?

THE NEXT HALF AN HOUR OR SO REMAINS A CRAZY, BREATHLESS BLUR TO ME, BUT CERTAIN PICTURES DO STICK IN MY MEMORY

3

THE CAPTAIN, FIGHTING TO PROTECT HIS MEN--AND HIS SHIP

LUKE, KATHLAR AND GUNNER NETTE, TOGETHER BY THE PERIMITER, SURROUNDED BY THE DUSK-CRAZED ANIMALS

LIEUTENANT FL'FF, RISKING A COUPLE OF HER NINE LIVES AND DISOBEYING ORDERS BY JOINING IN THE SHOOTING

CAPTAIN RUSSELL AGAIN, JUST WHERE HE WAS NEEDED

WHILE ALL THE TIME, BIGGER, NASTIER ANIMALS APPEARED, DRIVEN MAD BY THIS UNNATURAL OBSTACLE TO THEIR STAMPEDE AFTER THE SUN!

ON BOARD, EVERYONE! WE LIFT OFF IN TWO MINUTES!

AND SO THE BATTLE ENDED--WE RAN UP THE RAMP, HOPING THAT MOTHER NATURE COULDN'T DO MUCH DAMAGE IN 120 SECONDS

4

STRAP IN, EVERYONE, RIGHT AWAY! COME ON FL'FF, FOLLOW ME UP TO THE BRIDGE!

RIGHT AWAY, CAPTAIN.

PALMER, ARE THE ENGINES READY?

WELL, JUST ABOUT, IF WE TAKE IT GENTLY, CAPTAIN...

RUSSELL

RIGHT--TAKE US UP!

AND UP WE WENT, WHICH REALLY ENDS MY STORY. THE CONQUEROR WAS SAFE, A NEW WORLD HAD BEEN LOGGED...

--AND, LUCKILY, NOBODY HAD BEEN KILLED. BUT IT ALL GOES TO PROVE THAT YOU CAN'T JUDGE A PLANET BY ITS COVER!

END ADVENTURE ONE

DEDICATED TO THE WORKS AND MEMORY OF ERIC FRANK RUSSELL
"FOR TWENTY YEARS, NOBODY HAS RIVALLED RUSSELL AT HIS BEST."

Fan-Things

"It sometimes seems that fandom in its entirety is centred on those two pages", says Mike Taylor in MASTERS OF INFINITY ≠3 (see page 38 for details); since it's this column he's talking about, in the course of a 2-page article on Bem, is it any wonder I lead off with that particular fanzine? Besides this prime example of ~~crawling~~ investigative journalism, the 20 A4 pages include artwork by Alan Hunter, Roy G. Krenkel, Harry McAvinchey, George Perez, Martin Forrest, and Dave Harwood, plus five pages of letters, reviews, and a couple of strips, one of the "Hembeck" variety (whimsical comments on TV by Harry McAvinchey) and one superhero-type. If Bem ever gets run over, it's good to know there's a zine like this coming along. Not that it's a carbon copy, by any means --but if you only read Bem at present, I would certainly recommend this as the next fanzine for you to investigate.

A 2000 A.D. Appreciation Society is to be set up by Sean Egan,

he informs me; 2000 A.D. editor Steve McManus has given him the go-ahead, and should be co-operating by providing news and postal interviews with the script & art robots. A monthly newsletter and a bi-monthly fanzine are planned; a subscription rate of £3.50 has been mentioned, but at the moment just send Sean an s.a.e. for the latest situation.

MEANWHILE... That's the name of a new fanzine with a cover price of 35p for 20 8" x 13" pages, available from Neil Cowan

When I tell you it has a cover by Brian Bolland, and full-page art by Gary Leach, Joe Staton, Dave Hornsby, Nick Neocleous, and (two full-page strips) J.H. Szostek, plus Mal Burns on the Paris comics scene and a column or two, you'll no doubt be reaching for your cheque-book already (maybe 45p, to allow for postage?); the only criticism I have is that there's a lack of editorial direction, but, when he can get contributors like these to rally round, Neil doesn't need to be another Gary Groth!

Mention of THE COMICS JOURNAL's editor brings me smoothly to its new competitor, COMICS FEATURE; the first issue, in the TCJ format, has 68 pages for $1.50, or in the UK 90p from Biytoo Books (whose ad on the back cover should supply the address) --if anything I prefer it to TCJ, as it has more of an emphasis on comics and on fandom, thanks to editor Dean Mullaney & fan-expert Jay Zilber (the TCJ staff have a low opinion of the Marvelites they so assiduously advertise to catch, I feel!). This issue features an EPIC-orientated interview with Archie Goodwin, "The Legion of Super-Heroes Then and Now" by LEGION OUTPOST publisher Mike Flynn, the 10-page "Fandom Zone" (I wish I'd thought of that title!) on fanzines and fandom, a profile of Gene Colan, and other things. As a first issue, it's very impressive.

From even further away comes T.A.C.C. ≠10--from Joe Italiano,

Australia, to be exact. It has 40 6½" x 8" pages, including articles on Dr Strange, short run heroes, and women in comics, plus strips, reviews, tributes to the leading Australian panelologist, John Ryan (who died late last year), a Jim Starlin index, and details of the 1980 Australian comicon, scheduled for June 14th to 16th in Melbourne. It's a great improvement over the previous issue, and a good read; by sea mail, 4 issues would cost six Australian dollars...and think of the interesting stamps you'll get on the envelopes!

And STRIPS ≠12 comes to us from New Zealand; a 6-issue subscription can be had for the equivalent of 11.70 NZ dollars from Keith A. Walker.

It contains some underground-type strips, plus an article on eco-superhero Captain Sunshine -- as this is written by Colin Wilson, with some excellent art by him included, it may well tempt you to take a look. No doubt an s.a.e. to Lancaster would bring further details of the cost of subscribing, or getting a sample copy.

Enough of these elegant foreign fanzines --here's F.Z. ≠4, with 20 unreduced A4 pages for 30p from Steve Jones.

FZ has the excellent policy of publishing all submissions, which makes it a good place for all would-be Kathleen Glancys, Dave Harwoods, and Mike Crudens to start out --people taking advantage of this chance this time include Alastair Mabbott, John Gatehouse, Martin Brimicombe, and Max T. O'Connor, plus someone who insists he's Dr Frederic Wertham; there's also a good 5 pages of letters, a page printed upside down, and a good deal of promise; try it, you could well get hooked!

ELECTRON PULSE ≠1 comes from the home of good fanzines, Worcester (I didn't get where I am today without being a bit of a crawler!) -- 65p gets you 28 comic-size pages from Rob Davis.

Besides Rob, who has had strips published in WORKING KLASS SUPER-HERO and BEM, contributors here are Jo Harvatt (slightly reminiscent of Lee Marrs), Ade Middlebrook (a new look at the most over-used plot idea in history), and Jim Cook (a gentle dream of peace). Rob's story is the strongest, and a good showcase for his art -- I'd describe this as a fanzine counterpart to Star * Reach.

The usual plug for FANDOM ≠11 (20 A5 pages, print run 600, from Eddie Walsh.

it gets difficult to say anything new about a regular dealer's sales list-cum-fanzine like this -- an s.a.e. will get you a copy, and if you like the wide selection of comics etc for sale and order from Eddie, you'll continue to get copies. Not a bad deal!

PRINCESSIONS ≠10 (20 A5 pages--see page 28), the Wonder Woman newszine, has come in; articles on Star Trek and Kirk Alyn are included as well as the latest on the career of Lynda Carter. All presented professionally, neatly -- and well.

OGRE ≠5 was sent out between issues of GRAPHIC SENSE -- yet another bonus for GS subscribers! (24 A5 pages for 15p from Colin Gould otherwise.

Issue 6 should go out with GS 7 at the end of April (50p from Gez Kelly,

but the issue to hand will do to be going on with: it stars an article on Jerry Cornelius by Pete Scott, a personal view of fandom 1973-1977 by Colin, an interview with Cat Yronwode, 5 pages of letters, Andy Sawyer on Slippery Jim DiGriz... and the usual high standard of art, including a provocative cover by Bob Wakelin. Going by some figures you'll find later in this Bem, OGRE is in the "top five" of UK comics fanzines...I can certainly see why.

THE OWL'S EFFORT ≠4 (32 A6 pages for 22p from Richard Domar,

suffers from poor reproduction in some places, but is still a good read, with 17 pages of letters--and, due to the extra reduction, that's more reading than Reaction--along with a comprehensive sales list. It's actually only 4 pages badly effected by fade-away type--since the writers involved are Pete Scott and K. Williams, you'll probably take the time to puzzle it out.

SPEAKEASY ≠6 (10 A4 unreduced pages for 20p from Richard Ashford,

has "DON'T PANIC" in large, unfriendly letters on the cover (KW and I agreed that the lettering was too jagged to be described as friendly)--since it does <u>not</u> have any article on The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy inside, and its news is now two months out of date, give it a miss. But feel free to buy the newest issue at the next mart you attend, it'll be well worth the 10p cover price... but grumble a bit if they have yet another gimmick cover!

Ah -- nearly forgot. Retrieve your copy of Bem-26, turn to page 16, and change the date listed as the sixth "Comicbook Marketplace" (well, it's the way I always check on the dates of these events, held at Lyndhurst Hall, NW3) from September 20th to a week earlier, i.e. the <u>13</u>th. If you require a map, send a stamp to organiser Rob Barrow,

or ask him at Dark They Were.

Newly arrived (since the previous page was typed, yet) is FACTOR X ≠1 (28 A5 pages for 40p plus s.a.e. from John D. McKay,

it's partly a comics fanzine and partly devoted to wargaming, and as self-indulgent as first issues often are, but John contributes some nice art (including a 2-page strip based on "the most over-used plot idea in history" as I called it earlier), and a 6-page sf strip by David Trevarthen & Andrew Spratt comes out well... and Kathleen Glancy turns in a 2-page speculation on why Steve Rogers and Clint Barton look so similar, which has to be a strong reason to investigate! Not being a wargaming buff, 10 pages were wasted on me; however, that aspect, John informs me, is spinning off into its own fanzine next time, so that FACTOR X will have more room for strips.

I was talking to Nigel Balloch recently, and he assures me that the long-awaited next issue of THE COMIC REVIEW should be out at about the same time as this Bem. MEDIA should be returning in late June, with more of an emphasis on strips and fiction--it should then appear on a quarterly schedule. Nige will refund MEDIA subs if anyone prefers that--just contact him

Word has reached me of a new stripzine due out in May: TRIDENT (20p, blank postal orders preferred, plus postage, from John Matthews,

with strips by Phil Elliott, Bob Watkins, Mark Casto, and one drawn by editor John from a Kev Sutherland script. And the first 40 people to order it will get a free badge of The Drip himself!

From the same address--and John's brother Joe--is coming TALES OF CREATION ≠4 (at 35p, post included --cheques or postal orders payable to Joseph Matthews please), with a dramatic cover by Mike (no relation) Matthews, who also gives us a 4-page strip. Martin Dutton, Phil Elliott, Alan Hunter, and Steve Harris also contribute, and the series "Fearless" by K. Williams continues, while an interview I conducted a few months ago with Mo James also turns up in the "Fan-Talk" feature. It's quite a while since issue 3, but ToC.4 sounds as if it's worth waiting for!

THE EGG CHAMBER ≠1 (15 A4 unreduced pages for 22p from Sean Masterson,

When we started 'OGRE' we knew the last thing you wanted was another average fanzine
... so we combined interesting reviews and letters with unusual art, to make something extra special, see for yourself!
Just send 15p to: Colin Gould
Dealers rates also available

is a new sf & horror fanzine -- the name is nowt to do with Howard the Duck, but refers to "Alien". Short articles on that scary movie, plus Star Trek, Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy, House of Hammer, and post-Star Wars sf films are fitted in; a fair amount of interest to us, yes?

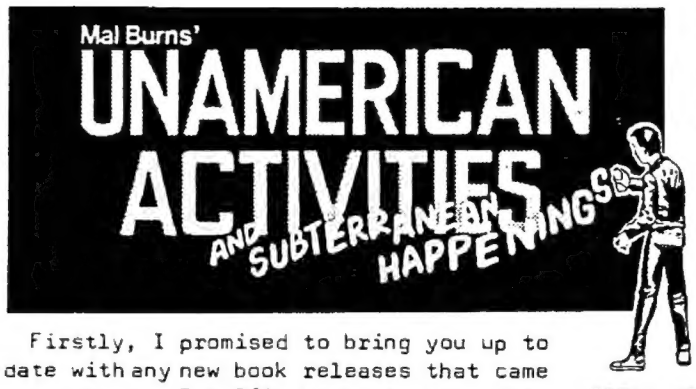
STAR TREK: THE MAGAZINE is, the publishers agree, a misleading title, making it seem a definitive magazine on The Motion Picture; rather, it is a fanzine (16 A4 pages for 77p from Powerpulse Productions.

from the people who brought us the cassette SOUNDZINE idea. There's some nice art, and the text makes a good tribute to a most amiable phenomenon. The high price seems to be a tradition with Star Trek fanzines, in my experience!

Apart from the alarming rumour "Hissing Sid supports Servalan", and who could doubt that such an alliance would be unbeatable, we reach our natural conclusion. It occurs to me though that I never review America's longest-running newszine, THE COMIC READER. Not only is it the source for comics news, appearing every month (and March's issue is dated ≠178), but it contains some interesting strip reprints (8 days each of Modesty Blaise, Superman from 1945, and The Seekers, plus a whole month of the double-height Star Hawks)... and some really funny one-page new strips. Jerome Sinkovec and Mike Tiefenbacher manage to give the zine a friendly approach that I always find appealing...if you want to get copies ahead of your local specialist shop, by air mail six issues cost £12, or 12 issues cost £23, from Street Enterprises.

To close with, let me say that I try to review almost every English-language fanzine received, either here or in "Fanhunter" in FANTASY TRADER--so keep those review copies coming. It's the same address as for Reaction, Bemuscene, subscriptions, or anything else to do with Bem.

-ED SALLIS



Firstly, I promised to bring you up to date with any new book releases that came too late for Bem-26's book report. They have been available for a little while now, as there wasn't room last time to fit them into this column, but they are still worth mentioning.

WONDERWORKS is a portfolio by Michael Whelan, and has over fifty full colour reproductions of his varied paintings. The book is a lovely package, and would have been in my top three Xmas buys if it had been here in time. The specialist shops have it, at £6.95--and it should be on sale generally in the late Spring.

My favourite new book is NIGHT MUSIC by Craig Russell. I believe it is Eclipse's first release since the McGregor/Gulacy SABRE volume. Russell's classic & romantic fantasy imagery is on top form, although it is a shame that the publishers limited it to black and white reproduction.

Mike Friedrich has issued STAR REACH'S GREATEST HITS as a prelude to the changing of STAR REACH itself into book format. I hope the forthcoming items are an improvement on this one. The cover is dull and, all in all, it is a shoddy package for a so-called trade paperback. The cover is thin card. The inside pages are on newsprint. All the strips have been seen before--Frank Brunner's "Elric" was only seen a couple of months back. The choice of content reads to me like the "worstest misses" rather than the "greatest hits". The "Elric" story is the book's saving grace, only in that the paper used here is very high quality, and the reproduction and colour register better than in HEAVY METAL, where it first appeared.

Heavy Metal Books have issued an illustrated adaptation of the Bett Midler film, THE ROSE. It is rather like a photo-novel, but exquisitely packaged and designed. The book has been released in England by Star Books, and sells a good deal more cheaply than the imported version carried in some of the specialist stores. Take note.

Lastly in this section, GIGER'S ALIEN from Big O Publishing has been delayed. The entire print run came back from the printers with the covers falling off. Not only did it have to be rebound, but certain interior changes had to be made. It was due out by Spring.

There are now three issues of SHOK THERAPY, featuring the art of Howard Priestly and Tony Webster. The first is un-numbered. The next two are number 1 and 2. A last issue (4, numbered 3) was announced --but I haven't seen it yet. Advance payment to 2, Newton, Boothtown, Halifax, Yorks, might help them get it out. The issues cost 50p each and are lavishly produced in card covers & good white stock interior paper. Issue three also has a guest strip by one of my favourite new artists, Stephen Baskerville. His strip "Maudlin's Dragon" was originally scheduled for GRAPHIXUS, and I'm glad that it's seen print finally.

Loudmouth artist, Mike Weller, has released two issues of his 1988 magazine in limited editions of 100 copies. I gather that the two have been bound together and subsequently reprinted. I think these are very worthwhile (if underexposed) efforts -- even important works of future history. Unfortunately, I am unable to locate an address for these, so you'd best look in the specialist stores.

Gilbert Shelton, creator & artist of THE FABULOUS FURRY FREAK BROTHERS, has a new book out called PHILBERT DESANEX' 100,000TH DREAM. It costs 50p, and is published by the Hassle Free Press

This item has not yet been released in the States, so this is a coup of sorts for Britain. The new book excites me a lot, and is a departure from Shelton's usual hippie soap opera and boring scenarios. Hassle Free also have a lot of imported underground comics available, which most of our specialist servicing organisations are too scared to handle these days. Collectors should take note.

There are no publishing or other credits on READINGS FROM SITHRE, but it features some truly great artwork by an unknown and uncredited creator. It sells at less than 50p, and I have seen it in most of the specialist stores.

The same lack of information applies to a weird experimental item called SIMPLY WHAT'S HAPPENING, which I picked up for 15p at a visit to FOREVER PEOPLE just before Xmas. I like it, but I'm blowed if I understand it.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE is a strange graphic magazine comprised of loose-leaf pages and odd objects in a plastic bag. David Noon tells me they all differ--and since we get no publishing address, we can't check. Once again, collectors should take note -- or like me, become quite confused and more than a little outraged. The purchase price per limited unit of one was around 60p.

Keith J. Luck's book THE SUCCESSORS has received a lot of coverage here already. I won't waste valuable space on this, but would like to add my name to those encouraging you to buy it. Keith's work is exceptional, and I'd like to see him get commercial exposure soon.

After about a quarter of a decade in the making, Brain (sic) Davies has finally brought out the first issue of RAT magazine. Unfortunately, it has ended up in a tabloid newspaper format, albeit with a colour cover. Nevertheless, 35p brings you a lot of strange articles, weird humour and plenty of visuals and comix by Malcolm Poynter, Hunt Emerson and the like. It is on sale at all good newsagents --if not, place an order with them. It should be arriving monthly, although delays could occur until the publication is fully on its feet. -MAL BURNS

Due to moving offices, Mal was unable to put together a column of the usual length; the above includes various short reviews that were squeezed out of Bem-27, but we hope they're still relevant. -ML

NEWS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6...)

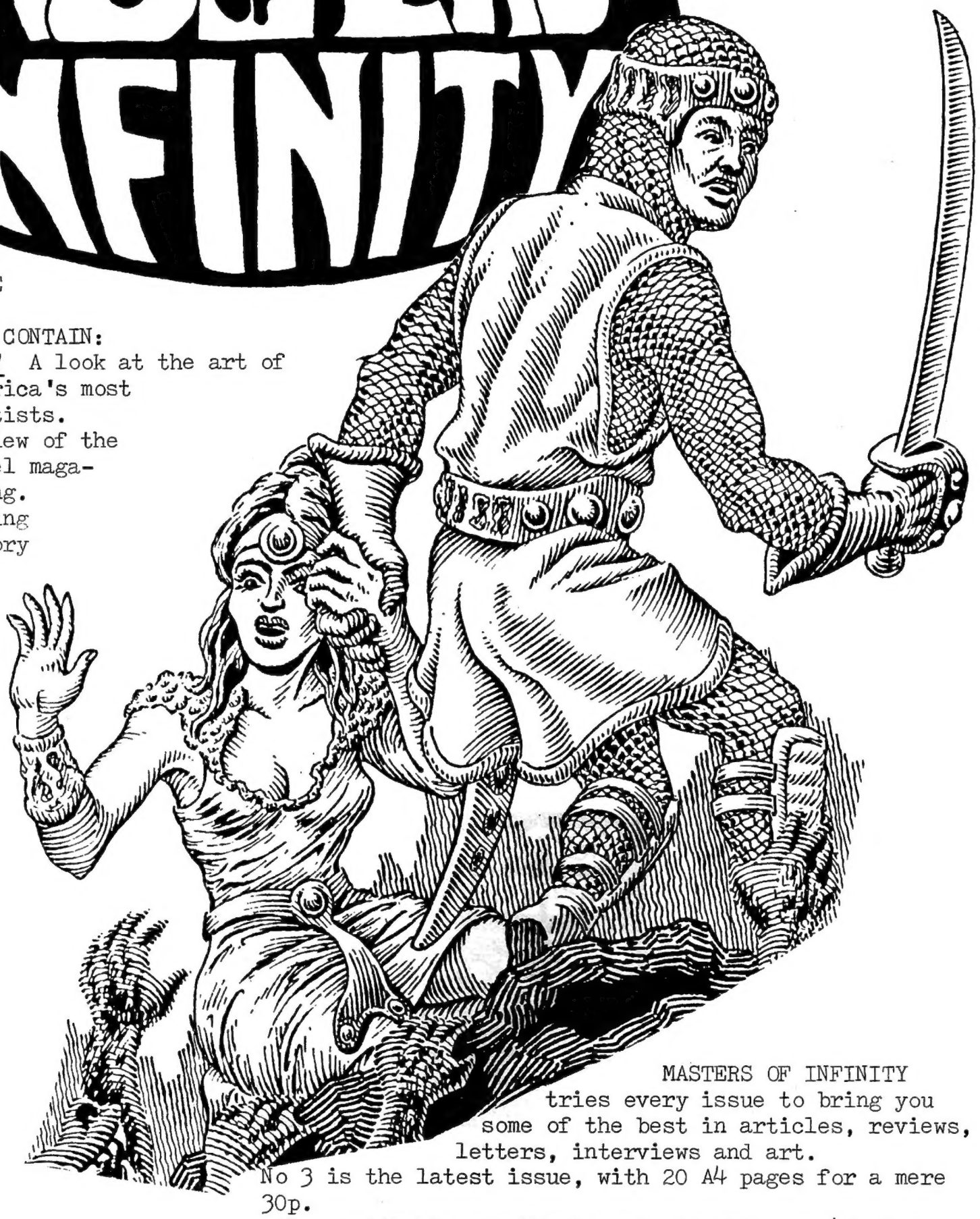
LION HOLIDAY SPECIAL, edited by Richard Burton, features a new 8-page story with Robot Archie versus the Spider, written by Roy Preston and drawn by Dave Harwood. Cameo appearances are made by Clark Kent, Peter Parker, and Manuel from Barcelona (via Fawlty Towers). Steve Dillon has done 6 spot illustrations for the new Captain Condor text story, written by Frank Pepper --"Black Max" and "Zip Nolan" reprints are included, plus a feature on five 1980 films, including Luke Skywalker's second adventure. It's out on 26th April. -ML

ART CREDITS.....ART CREDITS

Graham Bleathman: 39; Brian Bolland: 1; Laurence Bowkett: 7; Mark Casto: 10; Hunt Emerson: 35; Steve Gibson: 25; Dave Harwood: 2 (top); Dave Hornsby: 9; Boris J. Martin: 8 (strip); Wayne Massop: 15; Mike Matthews: 19; Terry M. Moore: 2 (strip), 18; Andrew Parry: 17; Superswipe: 8 (top); J.H. Szostek: 27, 37; Bob Watkins: 16.

Harvey Bendix
OH! MUMMY'LL BE SO HAPPY WITH THIS PRESENT I'VE BOUGHT HER FOR MOTHER'S DAY! SIGH!
BUY YOUR MUM CHOCS FOR HER SPECIAL DAY
YES SON, ANY MUM WOULD BE OVERJOYED TO GET THIS BOX OF BOZO'S LO-SUGAR, NON-FATTENING, SOFT CENTRE CHOCS!
MABEL BENDIX BELOVED WIFE AND

MASTERS OF INFINITY



NUMBER THREE
IS OUT NOW;
20 A4 PAGES CONTAIN:
THE STUDIO! A look at the art of four of America's most talented artists.
EPIC A review of the newest Marvel magazine offering.
BEM A tracing of the history and appeal of one of fandom's best mags.

MASTERS OF INFINITY tries every issue to bring you some of the best in articles, reviews, letters, interviews and art.
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Also available are Nos 1&2 at 25p each, or 45p for both.

Number 4 is due out in late May/early June. Order now for 35p and freeze prices. Subscription rates = £2.00 for 6 copies. Subscribers also receive occasional extras and are unaffected by price increses. Give us a try!

£2.00 FOR 6 ISSUES. 30 PENCE FOR NUMBER 3. 45 PENCE FOR 1&2.

From; Mike Taylor,

THE BEM BALLOT

- By the end of March, 123 Bem Ballots had been sent back--and this is how the votes were cast.

Favourite part of Bem: no doubts here, Reaction polled 50.4%, followed by the news with 19.4%, interviews with 9.2%, and Katholicity with 4.9%.

Least favourite part: Unamerican Activities got 19.5% of the vote, Katholicity got 10.6%, and Fan-Things got 7.3%. Most parts got at least one vote here, while a few people disliked the last page...

Should there be more news & cover reproductions? Well, 39.8% said yes, 7.7% said they'd prefer less, and 52.5% wanted the same quantity as before.

How many pages long should Reaction be? 12.2% wanted it to be as long as possible, but averaging out the numbers quoted, from 1 up to 12, gives the optimum number as 7.3352941. Are you sure about that?

Should Bem feature more art by professional artists? 34.8% said yes, 11.9% said less, and 53.3% are happy as we are.

On the subject of Bem's number of pages and price, the possibility of paying 60p for 44 pages turned 24.4% of respondents off, but got the thumbs-up for 29.7%. A canny 45.9% gave a resounding "perhaps"!

The voting in the "Favourite Regular Bem Writers" category went like this:

Martin Lock	27.0%
Kathleen Glancy	24.1%
K. Williams	11.6%
Ed Sallis	10.2%
Mal Burns	8.4%
Mike Cruden	5.8%
Nige Edwards	4.8%
Howard P. Siegel	3.6%
Pete Scott	1.5%
Alan R. Cookson	0.9%

And the "top ten" for Reaction's letter of comment writers came out thusly:

Dave Harwood	17.3%
Kathleen Glancy	15.7%
Chris Ash	11.2%
Maureen James	9.2%
Graeme Bassett	7.6%
Cat Yronwode	5.4%
Nige Edwards	4.5%
Barry K. Winetrobe	4.3%
Theo Clarke	3.1%
Les Chester	2.9%

While for Bem artists, we got:

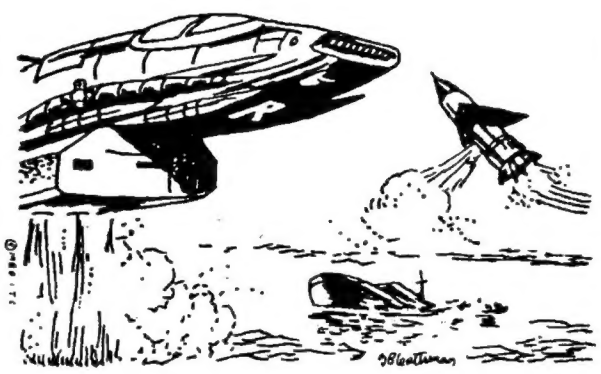
Dave Harwood	20.3%
Terry Moore	14.6%
Russ Nicholson	6.5%
Mark Casto	5.7%
Colin Wilson	5.5%
Hunt Emerson	4.7%
Mike Matthews	4.3%
Brian Bolland	4.1%
Pete Scott	3.9%
Superswipe	3.5%

There can be little doubt who's actually the best artist from that group; it's just that most people connect him not with Bem but with 2000 A.D.! Anyway, on to people's favourite fanzines, excluding Bem:

Comics Unlimited	15.3%
Graphic Sense	11.1%
The Comics Journal	9.5%
Vertigo	9.0%
Ogre	7.1%
The Comic Reader	5.4%
Comic Media News	5.1%
Cerebro	4.6%
Panelologist	4.1%
Fantasy Trader	3.3%

Among the 27 other fanzines voted for, Argent Void Press, Working Klass Superhero, Apocalypse, Masters of Infinity, & Doomzine were also well supported.

The next two categories, for fanzine writers and artists who don't normally contribute to Bem, threw up some quirky results, with votes often going to people I do consider to be Bem contributors--Alan Austin, however, was comfortably in the lead in the writers category (followed by Barry Winetrobe, Maureen James, Colin Gould, Cat Yronwode, & Howard Stangroom), while Dave Hornsby ended up ahead of Avram Buchanan, with Paul Jay, Alan Hunter, and Nick Neocleous also strongly supported. Would you believe 61 writers were voted for in all, and 69 artists?



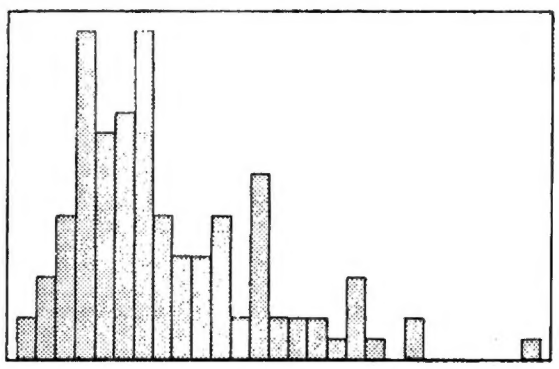
The number of fanzines read varied from one to 41, and averaged 6.3, while the number subscribed to was 3.4 per person. The Comic Reader is read by one-third of Bem's readership, always assuming that the people who filled in the forms are representative of those who didn't; The Comics Journal is read by 52.8%, Graphic Sense by 65.9%, and Comics Unlimited by 54.5% -- 69.9% buy comics by post.

How many British comics do you read in a week? Well, the maximum was 14, while 30.9% of voters admitted to a nil score; the average though was 2.00 comics per week, as opposed to 8.18 for the American variety. There were a wide variety of answers for the silliest question, "What's the most you would pay for a comic?"--from 50p up to £200, with one fan in three refusing to answer in case his suppliers found out! My calculator assures me that the average comic collection size is now 2,584.96...

When it comes to "favourite SF author", all the big names are represented; the UK's own Michael Moorcock heads the list, followed by Harlan Ellison, Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Harry Harrison, Kurt Vonnegut, Philip K. Dick, and Frank Herbert. That category had 45 different authors voted for; and in the "favourite rock (etc) group" stakes, there were 68 runners, led by Genesis and David Bowie, and followed closely by ELO, the Police, Blondie, the Who, Hawkwind, the Boomtown Rats, Pink Floyd; Devo, Yes, and Motorhead. On two votes each were Lene Lovich, the Beatles, 10cc, Kate Bush, and the Grateful Dead.

Top film? Why, Star Wars, of course--followed by 2001, Dark Star, CE3K, Star Trek, Alien, The China Syndrome, Monty Python's Life of Brian, Psycho, Superman, Apocalypse Now, Erazerhead, Play It Again Sam, Manhattan, If, and Citizen Kane. A good line-up for a comicon, I'd say! For the TV series category, Blake's Seven just beat Soap -- with MASH, the Prisoner, Dr Who, Fawlty Towers, Monty Python, Star Trek, the Rockford Files, Minder, Lou Grant, Tiswas, Hazell, Sapphire & Steel, I Claudius, and Sandbaggers all in hot pursuit -- programme planners take note.

And so to age (I won't mention the male to female ratio, just thank Wendy, Lilian and Maureen for contributing); 5 people (4 of them men) were too coy to fill in that bit, but graphing the remaining 118 gives the following shape:



We had two respondents aged 13, and one aged 39--the two peaks, of 16 souls each, are on 16 and 19. It's interesting that we don't get a fairly smooth curve; there are probably historical reasons for what looks to me like two curves, one peaking at 17-18 and a second, lesser one centred on 25. And the average works out at 20 years and 50 days: given that we were all on average 6 months into the age-year we claimed, and that the forms were filled in two or three months ago, we can all look forward to celebrating our twenty-first birthday soon -- I can hardly wait!

The "Fan Award" section is, as mentioned on page 2, going to a second round ballot based on the most popular answers, so we had better leave that for next time; the "any final comments" space was filled with various words of wisdom, such as Super-rabbit's (?) suggestion that it would be interesting to find out the birth-sign of each fan (Scorpio, Pisces etc), while John M. Parker asked "Why not join the X-Men Appreciation Society?" (I don't really need to, as I trade a copy of Bem for a copy of Cerebro), and our 39-year-old fan wrote in "Hee! Hee! Hee!" just to prove he's as young in heart as the rest of us. Kenny Penman wondered if the category in the "Fan Awards" for a "Hall of Fame" Award for past contribution to fandom was a set-up for me--that's a category I don't want to win yet, as it implies that the person voted for's contribution is mainly in the past. In fact, as judge, I'm using my power to cut off the list for the 2nd round just above me! Mike Cruden, whose age given, 106, I've discounted as a very slight exaggeration (and his favourite part of Bem is the staples), just said "'Bye", while Paul Strout proclaimed "I hate disco", F. Short warned "Make sure we see the results of this in Bem" (I'll think about it), Gary Millidge muttered (this is getting like a Boltinoff letter column!) "This took me bloody ages!", and David Gryc spoke for a number of people when he said "Make this bloody page bigger next time, okay?" However, let's leave the last word with Nige Edwards, who, no doubt thinking of the "Fan Awards", asked "Any chance of fixing it so I win?" -ML

Dark They Were, And Golden Eyed

An Important Announcement

Dark They Were and Golden Eyed is a famous name.

Besides being the title of a brilliant story by the poetic master of SF, Ray Bradbury, it is also the name that adorns the biggest and best Science Fiction, Fantasy and Comic Book store in the World.

That, is not a claim to be made lightly, we really do believe that Dark They Were and Golden Eyed is truly the biggest and the best in the world.

From SF to Fantasy to Ufology to comics to posters to art prints to masks to candles to undergrounds to a bewildering variety of subcultures DTW&GE have been all things to all people. We've always got something on hand for your speciality whether you are a specific item fan, a dillitante, a voyeur, or a member of that fascinated and fascinating body known as the public at large.

The swinging sixties and somnambulent seventies are now the decades of the past, the challenge of the eighties is before us.

Dark They Were has always led where others followed, always pioneered where others feared to tread, and cast a wide trail for the imitator to stumble over.

Change is upon us, Speculative Fiction is the literature of change, and we at Dark They Were are not afraid of change.....We are changing.... We are expanding, improving and evolving. Expanding our stock, improving our service and evolving into a better organisation.

Dark They Were and Golden Eyed is now firmly linked with some of the largest suppliers of fantasy product in the USA and UK, and associated equally firmly with the largest mail order comics and fantasy operation in the United Kingdom, Biytoo Books/Dangerous Visions.

Biytoo Books/Dangerous Visions are also pioneers, evolving and changing over the last six years, from small beginnings, into a large and highly successful worldwide comics and fantasy retail mail order business based on the twin concepts of friendly, efficient, continuous service and solid,secure packaging.

Superlative service allied with combined purchasing power are the keys with which we'll free our customers to enjoy the challenging eighties.

The Dark They Were and Golden Eyed retail store, currently on two floors, at St Annes Court, Soho, in the heartland of Londons entertainment district, will be redesigned and redecorated to offer all customers the fullest possible spectrum of Fantasy product available in the world today, in the most congenial, comfortable and friendly surroundings.

An expanded and extended mail order section will be handled by Biytoo Books/Dangerous Visions from their 3000 square foot warehouse, with a regular monthly list and update available quite free for a stamped, self addressed envelope.

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